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DECEMBER 1992

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by Bob Tippee

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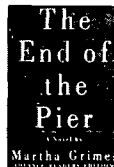
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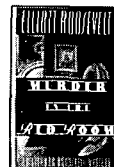
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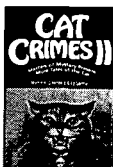
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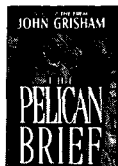
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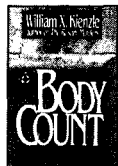
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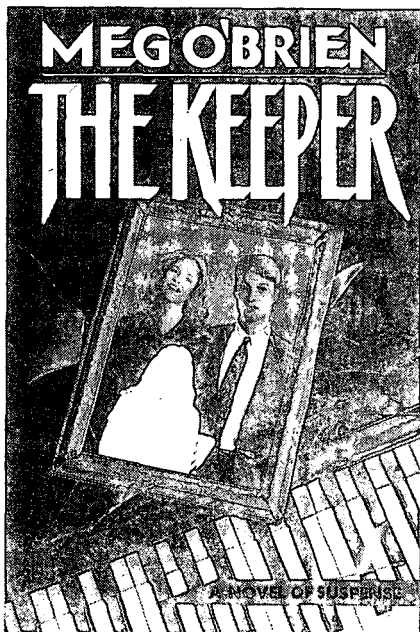
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# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

**A**n actor, an architect, and a musician have contributed stories to this issue of AHMM, two of them new to us and one of them returning after a long (very long) absence.

S. J. Rozan, the architect, has been involved in the design and construction of police stations and firehouses, writes architectural criticism (including an article on prison architecture), and has studied Tae Kwon Do. Lydia Chin, the young Chinese private detective unraveling a case in New York's Chinatown in "Body English," and her associate Bill Smith have previously starred separately in stories in *P.I. Magazine* and *The Fourth Woman Sleuth Anthology*.

Sonja Condit, a freelance musician, is a Canadian; "Corinne" is her first published story. She presently lives in Minnesota

and holds the degree of Master of Music, Performance (Bassoon), from the New England Conservatory of Music.

Robert Cenedella, the actor (a new career, by the way), is back in AHMM with "The Meeting Comes to Order," after an absence of thirty years. Along the way he has written a number of other stories for all kinds of magazines—*Good Housekeeping*, *Playboy*, *This Week*, for instance—and a novel, *A Little to the East*, published in 1963 by Putnam and included on the New York *Times* list of that year's outstanding books. Mostly, he has spent his time being head writer for six television series including *The Doctors*, *Return to Peyton Place*, and *Guiding Light* and has written hundreds of radio and television scripts.

We (re)welcome all three.

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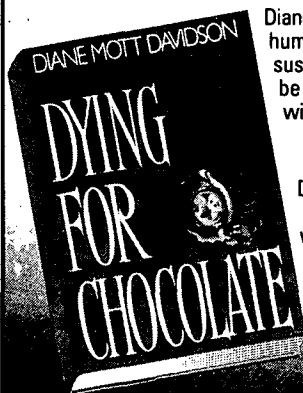
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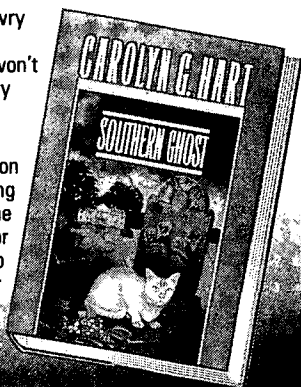
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FICTION

# The Man Who Lost Himself

by Bob Tippee

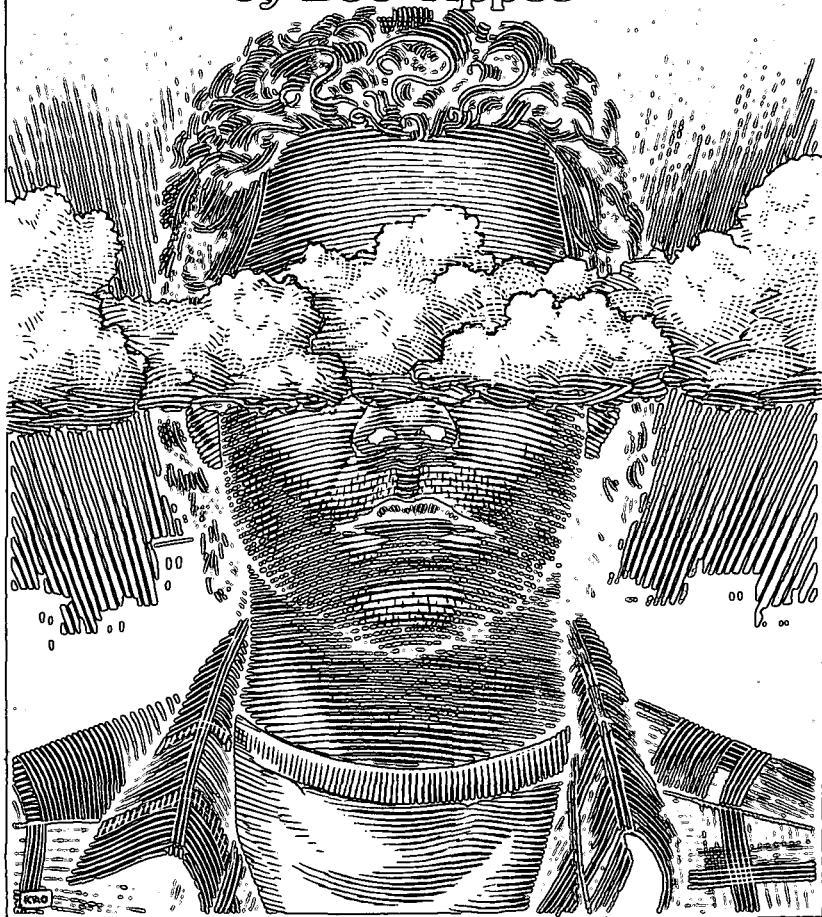


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**T**om Just Tom was accustomed to being awakened at odd times, usually by Willie G. or Samuel Ellington Michelstern or even Dink, standing at the cellar window and hollering down at him, "Tom! Tom, come quick!" because Psycho was having one of his spells or the Professor had trapped himself again inside the abandoned station wagon where he lived.

This time was different. This time somebody was shaking him.

Snoop? Here?

Snoop never came near the abandoned brownstone walkup in which everybody but himself and the Professor had claimed a corner. It frightened him. Snoop, who couldn't speak—or wouldn't—slept in an alley beneath a dumpster.

Snoop could have roused the others upstairs and spared himself the added fright of the cellar steps and eerie glow from street lamps through the head-high windows. He could have got somebody else to navigate the shadows to Tom's corner, to the rusty metal bed—the only bed in the place—that belonged to Tom by unanimous assent.

But it would have taken time for Snoop to communicate the problem in sign language to one of the men upstairs—Willie G., probably, the most likely to

have gone to sleep sober. For some reason, Snoop had come straight to Tom, in front of whom he now frantically waved his huge hands and bobbed his shiny head and jutted his ridged brow. This was serious.

"Leslie?" Tom asked.

Snoop stopped waving his arms and nodded vigorously, slicing the air with his sharkfin nose.

"Come on."

Tom jerked on his plaid flannel shirt and khaki trousers and zipped his fly as he ran up the steps. Upstairs, he called to the others.

"Leslie's in trouble," he yelled. "Quick now."

It wasn't until they were outside that he turned to Snoop and asked, "What is it? Fire?"

Snoop shook his head. He held one arm straight up and used the fingers of his other hand to represent a person climbing up. Short, craggy-faced Willie G., who had caught up and was tucking his sweatshirt into faded corduroy trousers at Tom's left, interpreted the sign. "You saw somebody on the fire escape outside her apartment?" Snoop nodded frantically.

"Damn amateur," Willie muttered.

Tom turned and sprinted up Fifty-eighth Street toward Pine



Avenue and the renovated walkups, the ones with wrought-iron fences and gas lamps along the sidewalks. The others clattered behind him.

They passed the boarded-up tavern between their abandoned walkup and two others, then the brick-rubbled lot where a whorehouse used to be. The Professor was cutting across the lot from his station wagon, as fast as his crooked leg would allow.

Tom didn't wait. He remembered how Snoop had come to him six or eight months ago with fear and wonder in his eyes when workers began renovating the walkups on Fifty-eighth Street and again, a few weeks later, when a blonde-haired woman and a man had carried boxes from a rented truck into the one closest to the vacant lot. Snoop was the first to notice everything. And now this.

Tom reached Leslie's building and, never breaking stride, vaulted the wrought-iron gate, leaped onto the stoop, jerked open the front door, and yelled, "Leslie!" He started up the wooden interior steps that led to the landing and Leslie's apartment door.

Leslie screamed.

A gunshot thundered from inside.

Heavy steps thunked toward

the apartment rear.

Tom reached the landing and turned toward the stoop. "Willie, find a cop!"

"But—"

"You don't have to give your name, for Christ's sake!"

And he turned back to Leslie's door and shouldered his way inside.

"S he was conscious when I got here," Tom told the officer.

"She kept saying, 'He said he'd be back.' You sure she's gonna be all right?"

The officer didn't look at him. "Nobody ever died from getting shot in the foot."

Tom felt funny. They were sitting at the round wooden table in Leslie's tidy, tiny, spicy-smelling kitchen as if they belonged there. Paramedics had just carried Leslie on a stretcher out of the bedroom and across the living room—with its lacy curtains, shiny antique chair and sofa, and knickknacks everywhere—and out the door.

"That's one fine-looking woman," said an officer standing behind the one taking Tom's statement. "What's she doing living in a neighborhood like this?" The officer eyed Tom, then glanced at the group huddled in the living room,

staring into the kitchen: Snoop, Willie G., Samuel Ellington Michelstern, the Professor, Dink.

"Gentrification, they call it," said the officer sitting across from Tom. "Folks with money move into these old places, fix them up, class up the neighborhood."

"Looks like it didn't work."

The officer taking the statement looked suspiciously at Tom. "What'd you say your name was?"

"Tom."

"Tom what?"

"Tom Just Tom."

"Christ." The officer wrote down "Tom Just Tom."

A third officer sidled in from the front door of the apartment. "Pete, we got hold of an ex, Averill Burke. He went straight to the hospital. Want to talk to him there?"

The officer—Pete—scratched his head and looked at Tom. "Tell him to stay put."

When the officer left, Pete asked Tom, "What's your, uh, relationship with the victim?"

Tom glanced at his friends in the doorway. All except Willie G. watched him anxiously. Willie G. kept his head turned away from the officer.

"She treats us nice," Tom said. "Like a neighbor. Not like the others who moved into this part of the block after she did.

They want to get rid of us. We don't bother anybody, don't even come up this way except when Leslie's letting one of us wash her car or help carry groceries."

"What do you mean, 'treats us nice'?"

"Talks to us. Gives us cans of food sometimes."

Samuel Ellington Michelstern blurted, "She gave me a dollar once." He belched. "More than once, I think."

Dink said, "She bought the Professor baseball cards, didn't she, Professor?"

The Professor nodded and began to recite the names of baseball players and their batting averages.

Tom leaned toward Pete the cop and murmured, "The Professor memorizes things. Can't do anything with what he knows, but he memorizes real good."

"She bought Twinkies for Psycho," Dink said proudly.

Pete looked up. "Psycho? Who's Psycho?"

"Guy who talks to himself all the time," Tom said. "Comes and goes. It's like he disappears, except I don't think he goes anywhere."

"Where is he tonight?"

"Don't know," Tom said. He glanced at the others, who shrugged and shook their heads.

"What does Psycho look like?"

Tom peered through Leslie's bedroom toward the rear window of her apartment. He didn't like this but he knew he had no choice. "Six feet, maybe. Beard. Weird eyes."

The cop pressed. "Weird?"

"Like he's scared or pissed off or something. I don't know. He didn't do it."

The cop behind Pete asked, "She say anything about the guy having a beard?"

"Ski mask," Pete said, shaking his head, still looking at Tom. "How come you don't think he did it?"

Tom took a deep breath. "She gave him Twinkies."

Pete kept looking suspiciously at Tom and said, "Charlie, get after this Psycho character. Check all the empty walkups down the block."

"But she gave him Twinkies," Tom said, knowing his protest wouldn't stop the cops, thinking about Leslie, thinking that caring about somebody was something he might remember if he thought about it hard enough.

A man was sitting by Leslie's bed when Tom and Willie G. went to the hospital to visit. He was maybe thirty and wore white sweats with blue stripes

down the sides and jogging shoes. He was trim enough to look like he really jogged, tan, with thinning hair and a gold watch and school ring. He sat with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hand, and he looked up when Tom and Willie G. entered the sterile-smelling room.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Tom Just Tom. This is Willie G."

The man studied them for a moment. "Leslie told me about you. Cops said you scared off the intruder. I'm grateful." He didn't say it as though he meant it. He didn't stand up or offer a handshake.

"Who are you?" Tom asked.

"Averill Burke. Used to be Leslie's husband."

"Yeah," Tom said. "She told me about you."

Averill glowered at Tom. In a minute he said, "They fixed some bones in her foot. She'll be out awhile, but everything's all right. Nice of you to stop by."

Tom should have thanked Averill, told him it was nice meeting him, and left. But he cared about Leslie, and it wasn't the first time he had cared about somebody—he was sure about it now. He wanted to remember the feeling.

"Others sent their respects," he said.

Averill chuckled. "Leslie's neighbors. She told me your names once—back before she started hanging up whenever I called. Let's see, there's you guys and the Professor and Tink—"

"Dink," Tom said.

Willie G. glanced out the hospital room door as though someone might be eavesdropping and said, "Dink would've come except he was afraid he'd screw up."

"Samuel Ellington Michelstern got drunk," Tom said. "The others don't like to get very far from home."

Averill reared back and folded his arms. "What about the one the cops want—Psycho?"

"Haven't seen him," Tom said. "He didn't do it."

"Psycho turns invisible," Willie G. said.

Leslie sighed in her druggy sleep and shifted beneath the sheets. The men watched her for a minute.

Averill broke the silence. "How come they call you 'Tom Just Tom'?"

"Can't remember anything but Tom."

"How come?"

"Can't remember."

Willie G. glanced at the door and took half a step toward Averill. "Tom showed up two, maybe three years ago, drunk

as a loon. Panhandling. 'Spare a buck or two?' he'd say. Working Pine Avenue mostly. We don't like panhandlers, but he looked like a man drinking himself past something who might get on his feet by and by. We let him stay around. Sure enough, he sobered up one day, got himself a job down at the truck docks, turned into a model citizen, you might say. Except he can't remember anything. Not even his last name. Must've been drunk a long time. Right, Tom?"

"Don't remember."

Averill shook his head. "So why'd you start drinking in the first place?"

"To forget, I think."

"Forget what?"

"Can't remember," Tom said, but it was partly a lie. Watching Leslie, he was remembering something, somebody, but he couldn't remember what or whom.

The door swung open.

"Averill!"

It was a woman: a short-haired blonde with a grey dress and dark blue jacket. Another woman followed her into Leslie's room, younger, slightly fat, with shoulder-length brown hair and a dark green pantsuit. Behind the woman was a man in a business suit who was maybe a little younger than Averill, with curly hair

and wire glasses. Glancing at Tom and Willie G., the newcomers stomped to the side of Leslie's bed in a cloud of perfume.

"How is she?" asked the blonde-haired woman.

"Fine," Averill said. "Minor surgery. The guy apparently spooked and fired his gun by accident on the way out. Hit her right foot. It'll mend. By the way, this is Tom Just Tom and Willie G. They scared the guy away. Guys, these are friends of Leslie's. From her office. Sorry, I forgot your names."

The women and man turned and looked at Tom and Willie G., wrinkling their noses. "Of course," said the blonde-haired woman. Turning back to Averill, she said, "We hear it's a dreadful neighborhood. It's such a struggle for a woman suddenly on her own."

Averill cleared his throat. "Have you seen Leslie's new place?"

The three of them shook their heads. "She said something about planning a housewarming," the man said. "We haven't met. I'm Jack Hensley."

He and Averill shook hands.

"I'm sure she intended to invite you, too, Averill," the brown-haired woman said.

"Excuse me, Averill," said Tom. "Me and Willie G. got to

get going. We'll keep an eye on her place."

"I'll be around myself," Averill said. "She'd probably just as soon I didn't, but I feel like I ought to."

"Yeah," Tom said.

As he and Willie G. stepped into the hall, a woman's voice trailed after them: "Those must be Leslie's trash puppies. Averill, what on earth is she trying to prove?"

Tom didn't visit the hospital again. He didn't want to embarrass Leslie. Anyway, he was getting four, six hours of work a day at the truck dock, unloading fruit shipments from the West Coast, making enough to get by and help out the others a little.

Each evening he strolled up Fifty-eighth Street toward Pine Avenue and the reconditioned walkups, close enough to Leslie's to make sure everything was all right. He went alone. He could make himself look like he belonged there, not like he lived in one of the decrepit buildings down the street with drunks and misfits. He didn't look like a trash puppy. He just was one.

Tom patrolled the empty walkup because he cared about Leslie and didn't know what else to do and, more than that, because the caring felt good. It



felt good and it felt familiar, and he couldn't help trying to figure out why.

Before he became a trash puppy he'd been a drunk and a panhandler, but he must have been something before that, too. For a man who can't even remember drinking the pint of Thunderbird he just peed down a rusty drain in an alley where nobody goes, the future's all there is. But when the future starts to happen, a man can't help wondering what happened before.

Leslie made the future happen for Tom. Willie G. and the others helped. But it was mostly Leslie and the way she helped Tom and his friends and the way she let them help her and the way she didn't care if they were trash puppies or not. She gave Tom somebody to care about. And now his caring, his leaning against the brick side of her apartment where the street lights and gas lamps didn't reach, was reminding him about something in his past that wasn't entirely gone.

Once while he was standing on the lonely side of Leslie's building just about dusk on a cloudy, windy day when it was cold enough to make him zip his jacket up around his neck and wish he had a sweater underneath, he saw Psycho. The strange, bearded man walked

around the corner from the back, talking to himself as always, not expecting to see anybody on the side. Psycho froze when he saw Tom, eyes glowing over his beard, then turned and disappeared the way he had come.

"Psycho, wait!" Tom trotted down the side of the building. "I know you didn't—"

But when Tom turned the corner Psycho was gone.

Two nights later Tom found Averill Burke outside Leslie's gate, his red Volvo parked in front. Averill was just standing there, hands in the pockets of his overcoat, staring up at Leslie's apartment.

"I had somebody I cared about once," Tom said before he could think about whether it was the right thing to do.

Averill looked up slowly, as though he had expected to find Tom around. "Yeah? Who?"

"Can't remember," Tom said. "I care about Leslie."

Averill sighed. "Me, too."

"How come you and her got divorced?" Tom asked.

Averill pulled his hands out of his pockets and slapped them against his hips. "How come you live like—" He snapped one hand toward the abandoned buildings on Tom's end of the street. "Like—"

Tom finished for him. "Like a trash puppy?"

Averill looked surprised.

Tom said, "Don't know for sure."

"And I'm not sure why Leslie and I got divorced."

Tom looked around at the renovated walkups. "A bunch of people who moved into these places tried to get us thrown out. Said we were dangerous. Leslie stopped them."

Averill stretched his neck and rolled his head around once, twice, then folded his arms. "No offense, Tom, but it only takes one dangerous type to make a whole group look like trouble."

"Psycho's not dangerous," Tom said. He thought about his encounter with the disturbed man and wondered if he was doing anything against the law by not mentioning it.

"Who assaulted Leslie, then?" Averill asked gruffly, his voice cracking at the end.

Tom shrugged.

"How is she?"

"Up and walking, home any day now. I offered to pick her up at the hospital. She wouldn't have it."

Averill's head bowed, and his shoulders drooped. Leslie's rejection of him obviously had hurt. Tom couldn't think of anything to say or of a reason why he should try to comfort

somebody stupid enough to let Leslie get away.

After a while, Averill straightened up and stared at the front door.

"Carrying her things up those stairs must have been a bitch," he said.

"Me and the others carry grocery sacks up for her," Tom said. "It's not so bad if—" He remembered the day Leslie had moved in, when he and Willie G. and Snoop had watched from the shadows two blocks away, watched the sprightly female form in red slacks and a white T-shirt float gracefully between the rented truck and the stairs, carrying the light things, leaving the heavy things to her companion, the man who had helped her.

"Didn't you move her in?" he asked.

Averill shoved his hands back into the pockets of his overcoat and shook his head. "We weren't even talking then. She wouldn't let me get near this place. I had to call a mutual friend where she works just to find out her address and phone number." He half sighed, half chuckled. "Rita Showalter. Keeps me informed, if you know what I mean. Thinks things might still work out between Leslie and me. Part of me wants to believe she's right."

Tom shook his head. "But I saw you. I mean I saw a man. The first time Leslie mentioned her ex-husband, I figured it was him—you—I saw helping her move in."

"You're saying there's a man someplace who knows where she lives, somebody who's seen the inside of her apartment, maybe came back to attack her?"

"I think you ought to ask her."

"She won't answer the phone if she knows it's me. Besides, she'd be asleep now. But I could call Rita. Know where there's a phone booth?"

"It was Jack Hensley," Averill said as he slid back into the driver's seat of the Volvo. Tom had directed him to the phone booth outside a convenience store on Sixtieth Street. "He helped Leslie move. Rita says he's harmless."

"The guy from the office?" Tom asked.

Averill nodded and started the car.

"The guy who came to the hospital with the two women."

"Yeah. Like I said, harmless." Averill steered across a parking lot littered with beer cans and sandwich wrappers toward Pine Avenue. Street lights cut moving bands across the hood and windshield.

Tom thought about Leslie and how gay she had seemed the day she moved in, how much like a little girl. Then he thought about Leslie and a stranger coming to her, frightening her, threatening her, shooting her.

"Averill," he said loudly, too loudly, surprising himself. "Don't you remember?"

"Remember what?"

"Jack Hensley. At the hospital. He said he didn't know where Leslie lived."

For a moment Averill said nothing. He watched the road and drove. Then, "Something's wrong here. I've got to talk to her. In the morning I'm going to talk to her, no matter what she says."

Tom didn't wait for morning. After Averill dropped him at the abandoned walkup he found Willie G., who listened to Tom's story and said, "I'll get my tools."

They scrounged three dollars in quarters for bus fare. Then they walked to Leslie's apartment. Tom thought they should sneak through the rear fire escape. Willie G. said they should walk up the front steps like they owned the place. Tom yielded to experience. With a lockpick that looked like a tiny saw blade with a wire antenna,

Willie G. opened the newly repaired door in seconds.

"Don't touch anything," Willie G. said, pulling on thin rubber doctor's gloves. Tom had never heard his friend sound so cool, so professional.

From the gym bag that carried his tools, Willie G. pulled a small flashlight and quickly found the telephone on the kitchen wall. He searched drawers within reach.

"Here it is," he said, holding up a hand-sized spiral binder with tagged pages and envelopes and loose papers stuffed inside.

Tom stood with his arms crossed, waiting, not wanting to touch anything. Leslie would have understood. He still felt strange. He felt . . . he felt as though he were being watched.

He swung toward the rear of the apartment, toward the window through which the intruder had entered. Had he heard something without realizing it? Seen something move out of the corner of his eye?

He tiptoed into the bedroom, passed between the bed and Leslie's antique vanity and mirror, and peered out the window, chilling, hoping to see nothing.

Nothing is what he saw.

"Hensley, Hensley," Willie G. was saying in the kitchen, flipping through the pages.

Tom eased back to the kitchen, angry that he had let his imagination trick him.

Willie G. said, "Here it is: 1512 North Elm, Apartment G. I know the place. Lots of trees, shrubs. Shouldn't be a problem." He closed the notebook, put it back in its place, and closed the drawer.

In a few minutes, Tom was in his creaky bed, thinking he should have been awake because he was worried about the next morning. But he didn't worry because he didn't think he'd be doing anything wrong.

What kept him awake was the somehow familiar feel of taking a risk for somebody he cared about.

"No answer," Tom said, sliding next to Willie G. on the bus stop bench a block from Jack Hensley's apartment. There was no one else around. It was ten o'clock, too late for the work crowd, too early for lunch.

"You're sure it was the right apartment?" Willie G. asked, not looking at him.

"Sure."

"And you waited long enough? He could've been in the shower. Maybe a girlfriend lives there, too."

"I knocked three times. He lives at the end of the building. There's an apartment next door but it's got a patio or something

with a fence around it in between."

"See the door from the street?"

Tom nodded. "But there's lots of bushes."

"Stay on the sidewalk the first time by," Willie G. said. "Don't look at the place."

Willie G. led them around the block three times, studying not Jack Hensley's apartment but the other buildings nearby: apartment buildings on each side, a convenience store and a bicycle shop across the street. Tom's heart pounded. He thought about Leslie. He repeated her name in his mind, trying to make it cover up the throbbing in his ears.

Leslie. Leslie. Leslie. Ginny. Ginny?

"We'll come around the shadowed side," Willie G. said. "There's a deadbolt and a door knob lock. No problem, but you're going to have to carry this."

Tom took the bag, from which Willie G. removed two lockpicks. Tom hadn't noticed his friend so much as glancing at the door, yet he already knew the lock types.

Ginny. Who was Ginny?

"Don't look anywhere but straight ahead," Willie G. was saying. "Anybody sees us, they'll think we're janitors."

They coursed around the side

of the building, Tom's heart pounding so hard now he could feel it in his throat.

Leslie. Leslie. Ginny. Ginny.

A tool in each hand, Willie G. picked the locks simultaneously. The men stepped inside.

Jack Hensley liked black leather furniture with chrome trim. All the tables in the apartment had glass tops. The carpet was thick and not quite white, and the people in paintings on the walls looked like mottled space creatures.

Tom walked toward the kitchen.

"Not going to find anything there," Willie G. said. "Back here." He already was turning the corner into a hall. When he reached the bedroom door, he said, "Oh, shit!"

Tom followed him into the room. Pictures of Leslie covered the wall over the bed: Leslie in a summery-looking dress at her desk at work; Leslie in shorts and a tank top playing volleyball with a group of people that included one of the women Tom had met in the hospital; Leslie in a swimming suit on the deck of a pool with people all around. All the scenes looked like company social events: picnics, parties, receptions.

Tom found a fancy-looking camera on a desk across from the bed. "Must be the company photographer."



"Look at these," Willie G. said. He had been sifting quickly through brown envelopes stacked next to a telephone on a nightstand by the bed. He handed one of them to Tom.

The envelope contained ten or fifteen other photographs, not as clear as the ones on the wall: Leslie in her bra and panties standing in front of the mirror over the vanity in her apartment; Leslie in less than that drying herself with a towel; Leslie in a sheer nightgown pulling back the covers of her bed—all of them shot through slits between the curtains of her bedroom by someone standing outside on the fire escape.

Tom grabbed the telephone and found a directory. He dialed the hospital's number and asked for Leslie's room.

"Floor nurse."

"I need to talk to Leslie Burke."

"Sorry. Miss Burke was released this morning."

"She go with her ex-husband?"

"I think so—no, that can't be. Her former husband came in later and was surprised she had left. It was another man."

"Lady, do me a favor: call the police; tell them to go to Leslie's apartment. That man she left with is a rapist."

Tom turned toward a sound in the hall behind him. Willie G., whom Tom hadn't noticed going back into the bedroom, hurried into the living room carrying a grey vinyl case.

"Look at this," he said.

The inside of the case had tan foam padding on both sides, with the slightly oily imprint of a revolver in the middle, empty.

**T**he bus stop. Pacing. Not talking. Leslie. Leslie. Leslie. Leslie and Ginny. Ginny and Anne.

Then the bus. Too slow. Leslie. Ginny. Anne.

"She'll be okay," Willie G. said somberly. "We did everything we could."

Slow. Slow. Whatever was going to happen probably already had. And Tom Just Tom hadn't been there. Again.

Again?

What hadn't he been there for before? Who were Ginny and Anne?

"There's gonna be questions," Willie G. said.

Tom nodded as though he understood. He was thinking about Ginny and Anne, trying hard to remember.

The police had already arrived, three squad cars—no, four—and one unmarked, each

with blue and red lights twirling on top. And an ambulance.

Tom was out of breath when he reached Leslie's apartment. Willie G. wasn't far behind, tools clanking in his gym bag.

Snoop was there; and Samuel Ellington Michelstern, who looked sober; and the Professor, who asked Tom if he knew there were fifteen hundred and six official vehicles in the city. And Dink.

"Tom," Dink said as Tom pushed through a crowd of strangers toward the apartment gate. "Tom, it's getting dangerous in this neighborhood. Don't you think?"

"I'm a friend of the woman's," Tom told a policeman standing outside the gate. The cop glowered at him.

Tom quickly added, "I had the hospital call."

The officer raised his eyebrows. "Stick around. Inspector Rogers is going to want to talk to you."

"What happened?" Tom asked. "Is Leslie okay?"

"A guy got shot," the cop said. "Doesn't look too good." Then he snapped his head up and barked, "Everybody away from the ambulance now. Make way."

Two burly men in white slacks and light blue jackets carefully descended the stairs, carrying a stretcher with folded

metal legs. At the bottom of the stairs they extended the legs and began to wheel the stretcher toward the ambulance. Tom ran to them.

It was Psycho. His eyes were wide and jerky. Blood soaked through bandages on his chest.

"Psycho, what happened?" Tom asked. He heard Willie G.'s gym bag rattle up behind him.

"Out of the way," one of the medics said.

"Tom," Psycho said when he found Tom's eyes. "She gave me Twinkies." And his eyes closed, and the medics scurried him into the ambulance and shut the door.

"Leslie!" Tom yelled, then ran up the steps three at a time. He knew who Ginny and Anne were now. Seeing Psycho made him remember. Ginny had been his wife, Anne their three-year-old daughter. Seeing Psycho dying made him remember. Ginny and Anne were dead.

Leslie was sitting at the kitchen table, Averill next to her, holding her hand. A man in a sportcoat and tie sat across from them, writing in a notebook. Other officers milled around the bedroom, where Jack Hensley sat on the bed in handcuffs, chin on his chest.

Leslie smiled when she saw Tom.

"It was Jack," she said, her

voice full of life as always, but wavering.

"You okay?" Tom asked.

She nodded. Averill said, "Psycho saved her. He must have been watching from the fire escape. He wrestled Hensley away and—"

"I know," Tom said.

"Who are you?" asked the man in the sportcoat.

"Tom Richmond." Leslie and Averill jerked their heads up. "I'm the one who asked the nurse to call you guys."

"I need to ask you some questions," the man said. "I'm Inspector Rogers."

"Yeah," Tom said. "Just a minute."

He walked out of the apartment to the top of the steps. Snoop stood at the bottom with Willie G.

"She's okay," Tom yelled down.

Snoop nodded and smiled for an instant. Willie G. turned away.

"Willie," Tom called. "Thanks for everything."

Willie didn't turn back.

Tom told Inspector Rogers everything, as slowly as he could, giving Willie G. time. The detective ignored the break-in.

Then the police were gone, and Averill and Leslie slumped together on a sofa in Leslie's

living room. Tom sat on a straight-backed wooden chair. Snoop, Dink, and the others had disappeared.

Averill said, "You saved Leslie's life."

"Psycho saved Leslie's life," Tom said, thinking of Psycho's eyes. He thought of Ginny and Anne.

Leslie cleared her throat and, staring at her hands, said, "We're going to try being married again."

"I was married once," Tom said quickly.

Leslie leaned forward and touched his arm. "You told the police your name. You remembered."

"Yeah," he said. He remembered everything now: the telephone call he received from the hospital telling him about the car wreck, about Ginny and Anne and how it had been over quickly so they hadn't suffered. He remembered it was raining, and they were going to a Christmas program at Anne's child care center where she spent days while Ginny sold dresses at Storey's Department store and Tom supervised the packaging line at Triad Automotive Products. He remembered he was supposed to have gone straight home to join them, to drive them. He remembered how he forgot.

And he remembered how the call came to the Four Corners House, where Tom had just bought the fourth round for himself and three other guys from Triad's packaging line.

Averill cleared his throat, leaned back in his chair, and crossed his arms. "Tom, I run a contract janitorial service, and I could use a resourceful man with brains, somebody who knows how to be dedicated. You

could stay as long as you want, at least till you get back on your feet."

Leslie looked at her husband and smiled, then turned toward Tom. "That's great!" she said.

Tom bit his lip and rubbed his chin.

"We want to help," Averill said. "What do you say?"

Tom looked at Averill. He couldn't look at Leslie now.

"Spare a buck or two?" he asked.

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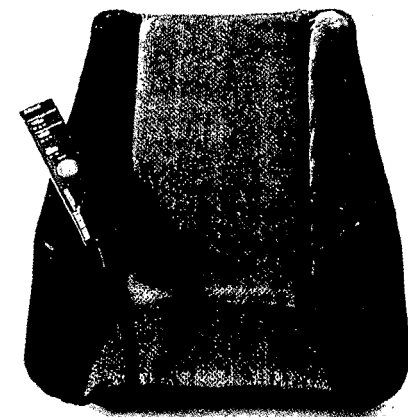
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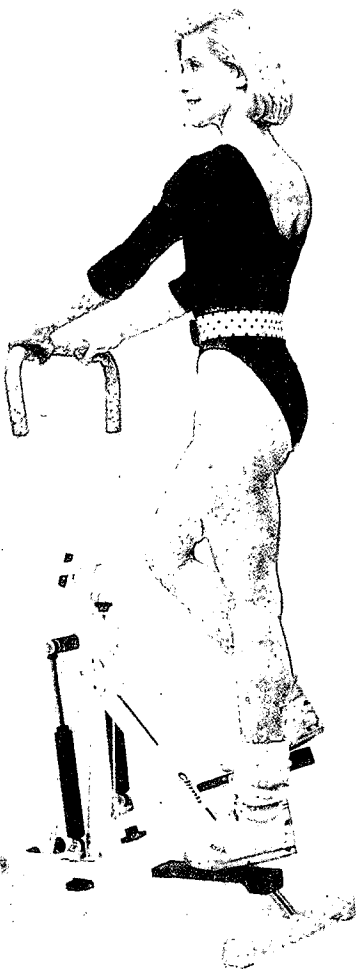
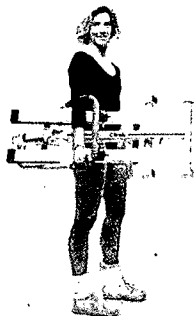


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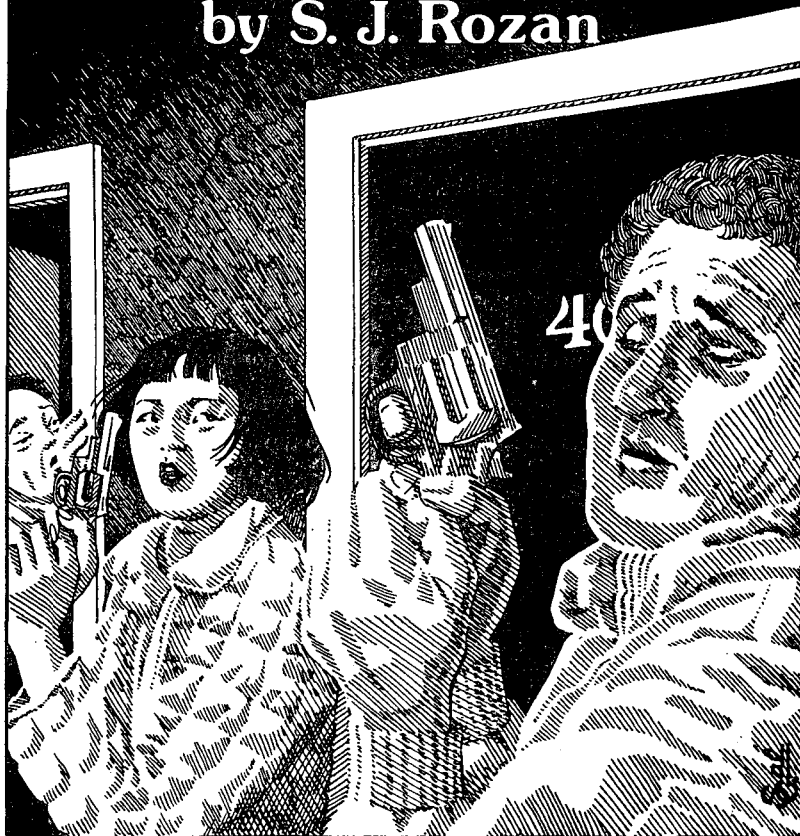


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FICTION

# Body English

by S. J. Rozan



**I**t was the first case I took that I didn't want. My instincts were right, too, because it also turned out to be the first case that made me wonder whether I wanted to be

a private investigator for the rest of my life.

"And she doesn't really even want me, either," I fumed. I was ranting to my sometime partner, Bill Smith, at the Pea-

cock Rice Shop on Mott Street. "Because I don't know Mandarin. She almost stomped out when she found that out. Stuck-up Taiwan lady! And she absolutely refused to speak Cantonese. She insisted we speak English. Can you believe that?"

"I always insist you speak English," Bill pointed out. He lifted sauteed squid from the serving dish into his rice bowl.

"Don't start!" I speared my chopsticks into a mass of deep green watercress in glistening sauce. "You big coarse clumsy foreign characters are exactly what the problem is, anyway."

Bill stopped a piece of squid just short of his mouth. "Foreign?"

I was feeling argumentative and crabby. "I grew up in this country. *Some* people spent their childhoods trotting around the world."

"That was my adolescence, and you grew up in Chinatown, which you've always said is another *planet*. Listen, Lydia, how about we talk about the case before you stab me with a chopstick?"

"Let me eat first," I said sulkily. I tried the squid; it was pungent and tender. It cheered me up a little, and the smoky, jasmine-scented tea cheered me more. Maybe my blood sugar was just low. "Actually," I said

aloud, "maybe I was just nervous."

"Mrs. Lee made you nervous?"

I hated to admit it, but it was true. "She's a very powerful woman in Chinatown. She owns four big factories here." "Factory" was Chinatown for "sweatshop," but Bill knew that. "My mother was terrified I'd offend her. It would have humiliated my mother if Mrs. Lee hadn't approved of me."

"But you say she didn't."

"No, but she hired me. She won't criticize me publicly while I'm working for her. That would make her look foolish, you see. Hiring someone as obviously inadequate as I am."

"I think you're adequate. I think you're way beyond adequate. Don't glare at me, tell me about the case. You're hiring me. What are we doing?"

"Following a woman. I figured you'd be good at that."

"Only if she's gorgeous and small and Chinese and furious like you."

He drank some beer, and I glared at him.

"I know why you're mad." He put the bottle down. "You hate this woman for making you nervous. You wanted to turn her down, but you had to take her case so your mother wouldn't lose face, and now you're stuck. Boy, you really

hate being told what to do, don't you?"

"You should know." I finished the squid. The stainless steel teapot wasn't empty yet, so I poured another cup.

Bill waited until I'd finished before he took out his cigarettes. "Is it all right?"

I didn't know if he was asking me if he could smoke now, or if I felt better. "Go ahead." Then I sighed, ran my hand through my hair. "I guess you're right."

"Well, that's rare enough." He dropped a match in the white ashtray with the red peacock on it. "Then the case is okay, it's the client who bothers you?"

I shook my head. "I don't like this case."

"Why? What's it about?"

"Mrs. Lee wants us to follow her son's fiancée. A woman named Jill Moore."

"She doesn't sound Chinese."

"That's sort of the point. She's tall and blonde and according to Mrs. Lee completely untrustworthy. Mrs. Lee thinks she's cheating on her son."

"Does her son think so?"

"No, and Mrs. Lee doesn't want him to know what we're doing until we have proof."

"Do you know him? The son?"

I nodded. "Lee Kuan Cheng.

Kuan Cheng Lee to you. He's a few years younger than me, but when you grow up around here, you sort of know everybody."

"What's he like?"

"When he was twelve he took on my twin cousins in the schoolyard because they beat him out on a math test. He's very competitive. They fought like weasels in a sack; I had to separate them. I think I still have a scar."

"Can I see it?"

"Not a chance."

"Sounds like your cousins were sort of competitive, too."

"In my family? Don't be ridiculous."

Bill tipped the ash off his cigarette. "So what don't you like about it?"

"She wants it to be true."

"Mrs. Lee does?"

"Yes. She was sitting there with an I-told-you-so smile, as though she'd already proved it. 'Jill Moore like rice,' she said. She looked like—what is it you people say? The cat that ate the canary?"

"That's what we people say. What does that mean, to like rice?"

"Yellow fever. Whites who are attracted to Asians just because we're exotic, or whatever it is your people think we are."

"Paranoid."

"Is that attractive?"

"On you it is. Go on."

I sighed, but I went on. "Jill Moore and Kuan Cheng are both NYU students. Kuan Cheng is getting an MBA, so he can go into his mother's business. Jill Moore's in Asian Studies."

"That's suspicious."

"Mrs. Lee thinks so. Kuan Cheng took Jill over to Mrs. Lee's apartment about six weeks ago, trying to make a good impression on the future mother-in-law. It was the first and only time they've ever met. She got Jill alone for twenty minutes, and based on that conversation, she's sure Jill Moore is only interested in Kuan Cheng for some perverse white-creature sexual reason."

"Don't knock white-creature sexual perversions until you've tried them."

"Oh, drop it, will you?" Sometimes I'm in the mood for that sort of stuff from Bill, but not always. "Anyhow, when I asked Mrs. Lee what made her suspect that, she gave me this superior look and said, 'Just, mother know. You follow, you see.' I wanted to sock her."

"Sounds to me like she wants to break up what she considers an unsuitable match for her baby. That's not admirable, but it's not unusual."

"Yeah, but I like happy endings. If Jill Moore and Kuan Cheng Lee love each other,

what business is it of his mother's? I mean, who *asked* her? But if I can't get proof that he's being cheated on, she won't believe it's because she was wrong. She'll go around telling all of Chinatown what an incompetent detective I am. That would be terrible for my mother."

"So," Bill said, "you can't win either way. If she's right, you'll be disillusioned. If she's wrong, you'll be in trouble."

"That's it," I sighed. "Exactly."

The waiter appeared, smiling shyly. He brought us the check, and two glass bowls of quivering maroon gelatin, each crowned with an almond cookie.

"What's that?" Bill eyed his bowl suspiciously.

I looked over to the door where Mr. Han, the proprietor, smiled broadly at me. I called to him in Chinese; he answered.

"It's a bean paste jelly his new chef makes," I told Bill. "He says even white people like it."

"At least he admits I'm a person."

"Well, he didn't exactly say that." He put his cigarette out, and we tried the jelly. It was sweet, tasting delicately of lychee and orange.

"Tell him I like it," Bill said.

I called to Mr. Han again. From his post by the door he smiled and bowed.

"What you're speaking with him," Bill said, "that's Cantonese?"

"Uh-huh. Only spoken by peasants like Uncle Hun-jo and me. I'm sure Mrs. Lee understands it, since she's lived in Chinatown twenty years, but she wouldn't stoop to speak such a harsh, nasty-sounding language."

"Is it nasty-sounding?"

"Of course not."

"I didn't think so."

Out on the crowded sidewalk the November air was cold. High thin clouds diluted the sunlight, and a breeze herded papers this way and that in the gutter, practicing for winter.

Walking north, we maneuvered around old Chinese ladies with short gray hair and padded jackets, picking over vegetables shoulder to shoulder with uptown shoppers who didn't know the names of the greens they were buying. A group of camera-hung tourists peered into guidebooks at the streets I grew up in. Vendors hawked cotton socks and radio-controlled toy cars, calling in broken English, "Three, five dollar!" and, "See it goes!" The street vendors are often the newest immigrants; sometimes those are the only English

words they yet know.

"I think Mrs. Lee speaks better English than she lets on, too," I said to Bill as we crossed Canal. "Or at least understands more."

"Her English wasn't good?"

"It was snooty and condescending, but her grammar was terrible. I think she refuses to learn it better, or to speak it as well as she already knows how. It would be giving in."

We single-filed past the sidewalk tables of a cafe in what used to be Little Italy and is still called that, though every other storefront sign now is in Chinese. "So," Bill said, "what now?"

"Now we go lurk outside Jill Moore's afternoon class and see how far we can tail her without getting spotted."

"Together? About a foot and a half."

Bill's thirteen inches taller, eighty pounds heavier, and twelve years older than I am, with big hands and a face that sort of shows he's been a P.I. for twenty years. I'm small, though I'm always saying I'm quicker and he's always saying I'm in better shape than he is. And we both know I'm a better shot, though it was he who taught me to shoot. I practice a lot.

And besides all that, of course, I'm Chinese. And he's



not. We do make a weird-looking pair.

"No," I said. "Not together. We lurk in different places."

It's a technique he taught me, and we use it often. It's good to have two people on a tail because subjects can be surprisingly sneaky about losing you, even when they don't know you're there. The only reason not to do it is if the client can't afford it. When I'd quoted rates to Mrs. Lee, she'd balked—"Too much. Inexperience child. I pay half."—and we'd had to haggle, but I'd expected that, so I'd started high. Now, for what she thought she was paying for me, she was getting both me and Bill.

I considered that a bargain.

Jill Moore's afternoon class met in an old white big-windowed NYU building on the east side of Washington Square. Tracking her down had taken me most of the hour between the time Mrs. Lee had sniffed her disdainful way out of my office and the time I'd met Bill for lunch. I'd had to use two different voices on the phone. For the Student Life Office I was a confused clerk from the Bursar's Office who'd gotten Jill Moore hopelessly mixed up with Joe Moore, or Joan Moore, or God knows who. The other voice, when I'd gotten Jill Moore's address and schedule,

was for Asian Studies.

"Herro," I'd said, blurring the distinction between L's and R's the way we're all supposed to. "I am Chin Ling Wan-ju—" that was the true part—"ah, guest lecturer in Flowering of Ming Dynasty Art, today. Supposed speak on 'Spirit Scrolls of Ming Emperors.' So foolish, lose all direction. Tell me, please, where to meet?"

They were glad to.

Bill pointed out, when I told him about it, that they might have been glad to if I'd just called up like a regular person and asked. But I always like to try out my moves when I get a chance.

Armed with the photograph Mrs. Lee had given me from the afternoon with her daughter-in-law-elect, Bill settled on a bench at the edge of the park with the other bums. I felt his eyes on me as I crossed the street to the classroom building.

I entered the building along with a group of four NYU women, one in jeans, one in sixties daisy-patterned leggings, two in short skirts. I made three in short skirts. The guard at the security desk, who would have stopped Bill in a second, hardly even looked at me, except to evaluate my legs relative to the other legs sticking out of the skirts.

We all got on the elevator, but I got off first, on the third floor. I went around the corner to the room where someone was lecturing to a hall full of students on *The Flowering of Ming Dynasty Art*. Not on *Spirit Scrolls*, presumably, even if there really were such things, which I doubted.

I settled myself on the floor at the other end of the hall where I'd have a good view of the classroom door and took *The Catcher in the Rye* out of my leather knapsack. I'd read it when I was fourteen and it hadn't done a thing for me, but I thought maybe, in this setting, I'd give it another chance.

After fifteen minutes of giving it another chance a bell clanged and all hell broke loose. Doors burst open everywhere. The advance guard—students whose next class was all the way across campus—charged out of the classrooms and were in the elevator or bouncing down the stairs before the profs had finished giving the reading assignments. Then came the slower ones, juggling books, notebooks, backpacks, and handbags the size of carry-ons. Textbooks thumped closed and zippers zipped and kids called to each other down the hall in exuberant voices and lots of different accents.

I stood, slipped my knapsack on, searched the faces pouring out of the lecture hall for the one in Mrs. Lee's photograph.

Jill Moore was not hard to spot. She wore a white shirt and bluejeans, dangling brass earrings, and, I noticed, a small diamond ring on her left hand. That encouraged me. A woman who was cheating wouldn't wear her engagement ring while she did it, would she?

Of course, rings are easy to take off.

As Jill Moore made room in her canvas carryall for her notebook, a handsome Asian man worked his way through the throng. He called her name. She turned, spotted him, smiled playfully. He reached her, seemed to be asking a question, but they were speaking low; I couldn't hear them. Still smiling, she shook her head, then looked around quickly. She leaned close and whispered something. He nodded. Then she squeezed his arm, twinkled her eyes, and was gone down the stairs.

I clumped down after her, thinking damn, damn, damn. I didn't know who that guy was, but he wasn't Kuan Cheng Lee.

I followed Jill Moore for the rest of the afternoon, through Washington Square Park where the fallen leaves were restless on the asphalt paths, to

the NYU library where she studied for two hours and I decided to give away my copy of *The Catcher in the Rye*. After that we shopped a little along Sixth Avenue, had cappuccino at the Caffee Lucca—she indoors, I out—and then, around seven, we wandered back to an old brick building on MacDougal Street. The whole time I could feel Bill nearby, always down the block or across the street from us, a figure at the corner of my eye who wasn't there when I looked.

The MacDougal Street building was what I'd been given as Jill Moore's address by the helpful secretary at the Student Life Office. I watched her go in, and I watched the lights come on in a fourth floor front apartment a minute later.

Across the street and down a little was another cafe. That's what I love about New York. I don't know how P.I.'s do this in the suburbs.

I settled at a table by the window in time to see Bill stroll around the corner and disappear. If the apartment building had a rear exit into an alley, I wouldn't see him again for awhile. He'd plant himself there, waiting until Jill Moore came out that way, or until I found him to say we were knocking off for the evening. This case was mine, so that de-

cision was mine to make.

There must have been no alley because he was back in a few minutes, lighting a cigarette on the street corner. I stuck my head out the cafe door, waved for him to come in.

He joined me at my round wooden table, ordered espresso and a Napoleon. I got peppermint tea.

"Thanks, chief," Bill grinned when the waiter was gone. "It was getting cold out there."

"Well, she may be in for the evening," I said. "If she's not, we can leave here separately."

But it turned out she was. As we sipped our drinks I told Bill about the man Jill Moore had huddled with outside of class. He said that seemed innocent enough to him, and I said the same thing, but I wasn't so sure, and neither was he, although he didn't say that. After about an hour we ordered an antipasto and shared it, dividing up chewy pepperoni, vinegared hot peppers, creamy rounds of provolone.

"How can you eat this after pastry?" I demanded.

"It's the white trash way of life."

"See," I said glumly. "The fact is we will never understand each other."

"And if we don't," Bill said, unearthing an anchovy and depositing it on my plate, because

they're my favorite, "is that necessarily because I'm white and you're Chinese?"

"Yes," I said. "It necessarily is."

When we'd come in, there had been opera in the air, dramatic voices crashing together or lamenting separately in ways I was sure would break my heart if I understood them. After that there had been silence softened by murmured conversations. Now the elegant mahogany-skinned waiter clicked a new tape into the tape deck, and the swift notes of a piano tinkled around us. Bill's face grew distracted, just for a moment; maybe someone else wouldn't have noticed.

"Do you play this?" I asked him.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Beethoven. The Waldstein Sonata. I don't play it this well."

"Do you—" I began. Bill put a sudden hand on my arm.

"Look," he said, nodding toward the window. "Is that the guy you saw this afternoon?"

The outer door to Jill Moore's building stood open. As we watched a young Asian man took the stoop steps two at a time, then unlocked the inner door and let himself in. He was carrying a knapsack and a bag of groceries.

"No," I said. "That's Kuan Cheng Lee."

Nothing else happened that evening. Kuan Cheng, according to his mother, had an apartment on East 9th Street. "Good for son," she'd informed me. "Live by own self, learn manage household. Later will able treat mother proper way." I didn't know what sort of household Kuan Cheng would learn to manage in a 9th Street walkup, nor had I been sure that this wasn't just Mrs. Lee saving face by pretending to approve of her son's moving out. What was clear was that she intended, eventually, to establish herself in whatever household he set up. Well, as a Chinese mother, that was her right.

Kuan Cheng didn't come out, and no one else we cared about—meaning no Asian men—went in, and around ten I called it off. I paid the check, took the receipt for Mrs. Lee, and left a big tip. Bill and I walked south on Sixth to Canal in the chilly blue New York night. Traffic rushed up Sixth in a hurry to get someplace, it wasn't clear where.

At Canal we arranged to meet the next morning and start all over again. We kissed goodnight lightly, the way we always do, and I felt a little guilty and confused, the way I

always do. Bill wants more than that from me, but he understands how I feel, and though he comes on a lot in a kidding sort of way, he never pushes it. Somehow that makes me feel guilty and confused.

Then we parted. Bill turned right to his Laight Street apartment and I turned left, to Chinatown.

The morning was overcast and chillier than the day before had been. Jill Moore had a nine o'clock class; at a quarter to nine Bill and I watched from separate corners as she and Kuan Cheng Lee came out of her building and walked up MacDougal Street. They were smiling and talking, Jill Moore's eyes twinkling as they had the day before, with the other Asian man.

The day was pretty boring, and I began to feel bad for Bill, who spent most of it on park benches. He doesn't like to be cold. I was fine, sitting in the hallway of the white building, in the student cafeteria (which was noisier than I ever remember my college cafeteria being), in the library, and then back in the white building. I had ditched *The Catcher in the Rye* and wrapped *Surveillance and Undercover Operations: A Manual* in brown paper so I had something to read in the long

stretches between clanging bells.

Jill Moore's afternoon class let out at three thirty. I was sitting on the windowsill at the end of the corridor when her lecture hall door opened. She was among the first out, hefting her bag, hurrying to the stairs. She galloped down them, and I followed her in a crowd of rushing people. I didn't get a chance to shove *Surveillance and Undercover Operations* back in my knapsack until we were striding across Washington Square Park. Jill Moore had much longer legs than I do—well, who doesn't?—and I began to wish for my Rollerblades, except that I had no idea where we were going. I also had Bill, who was keeping up with her pretty well, strolling along in a bum sort of way.

My idea about where we were going was right, and as Jill Moore unlocked the door to her building, Bill and I converged on the cafe across the street. The window tables were taken, but it was a small cafe; we could see the old brick building from the table we chose.

"Jesus Christ," Bill said, breathing on his hands to warm them. "I ought to charge you double for freezing."

"You ought to wear silk underwear."

"Will you buy it for me? I'll model it."

The thought of Bill's striking model's poses in silk underwear almost made me spray my peppermint tea all over the table.

"Go ahead," he said. "Laugh at me. I—" He stopped. I followed his gaze out the window, and we saw what I'd been hoping we wouldn't.

The handsome young Asian man Jill Moore had twinkled her eyes at yesterday came quickly down MacDougal from the direction of NYU. He looked around, entered her vestibule, rang an apartment bell. He was buzzed in.

"Oh, damn," I said, in a little voice.

We watched; nothing else happened; we drank a little. With a lift of his eyebrows Bill offered me some apricot tart. I turned it down.

The guy didn't come out.

"Kuan Cheng has an afternoon class," I told Bill. "A seminar. His mother told me. Tuesdays and Thursdays until six."

"Otherwise his schedule coincides pretty much with hers?"

I nodded.

"So this is the only time she can be sure of being alone."

"I guess."

Bill sipped his cocoa. "Listen," he said. "This isn't your problem. You were hired to find

out what's going on. Now your job is to take the client proof. How people behave isn't your problem."

"I know," I said. "But I like happy endings."

We discussed the fact that it might not be what it looked like, and of course that was true. We also discussed more practical things, like how to get photographs of whatever it was. This is where investigating in the suburbs has its advantages. You can't slink through the shrubbery and shinny up the drainpipe when the subject's in a fourth floor walkup on MacDougal Street.

You can, however, climb to the opposite roof.

Bill zipped his jacket and left. I watched Jill Moore's window. The shade, which she had pulled last night after she'd switched on the lights, was still lifted, and the lights were off. We had reached that time of year when it begins to get dark by four thirty. I was hoping we'd have time to find a place to look into the window before Jill Moore felt she needed lights and drawn shades.

Or, maybe, for what she was doing, she wouldn't need lights at all.

Bill was back in ten minutes. "Okay," he said, sitting down. "The building directly across from her, where the laundro-

mat is. I talked to the super."

"And he just said go ahead?"

"I gave him fifty dollars."

"Fifty?" I was aghast.

"The guy could get in trouble. The guy could lose his job. The guy could smell a quick buck when it came his way."

"Well, I guess it's okay. I guess Mrs. Lee won't mind paying that to get the goods." I knew she wouldn't. I paid the check, went out the door Bill held open for me.

At the laundromat building we rang the super's bell. An unshaven man emerged from a rear apartment, led us wordlessly up slanted stairs to the roof. He unlocked the bulkhead door for us.

"You be sure to close the damn thing tight, you come in," he growled at Bill.

"Sure," Bill said. "Thanks."

The super grunted, looked once at me, turned and shuffled downstairs.

The building was lower than Jill Moore's building across the street; the roof was about half a story higher than her window. The asphalt roofing slanted up to the top of the cornice at the front.

I lay on my belly on the asphalt and took the binoculars out of my knapsack. Peering through them over the cornice I had a perfect view into Jill Moore's window.

"What's happening?" Bill was low beside me.

"It's a living room. They're drinking tea and talking." I crawled back down a little and passed him the binoculars.

He peered over the top of the cornice.

"The light's fading. If you're going to take pictures, you'd better do it soon."

"This isn't very juicy stuff to take pictures of," I grumbled, but I got out the camera, attached the telephoto lens, and clicked away. I took half a roll, then waited in case Jill Moore and the unknown Asian did something more dramatic. Instead, Jill Moore got up, turned on a lamp in the living room, and drew the shades.

"Fooey," I said.

"We can come back Thursday, if you want," Bill said.

"Personally I don't want. But Mrs. Lee might want."

We went back in the bulkhead door—closing it tight—and down the street. We trudged south on Sixth Avenue; the air was cold and the car horns blared at each other ill-temperedly.

"I don't understand white people," I said. "I really don't. You saw her this morning with Kuan Cheng. She was *happy*. She's enjoying this. She's having a great time. You white people."



"Hey," Bill said. "I didn't do it."

"Yeah, but I'll bet you understand it. Romantic love isn't even a Chinese concept. Your people invented it. How come you mess around with it like this?"

I knew I was being unfair to him, and he knew not to answer.

I called Mrs. Lee as soon as I got back to my office. "I have something I think you'll want to see," I said. "I left some film to be developed. They say I can pick it up at six." I didn't ask her to meet me. That would be too forward, not respectful. If what I said was of interest, she would tell me what she wanted me to do.

"I come your office," Mrs. Lee told me. "Six thirty. You there. On time."

"Yes," I said, controlling my temper. "I'll be there. On time. Thank you, Mrs. Lee." I hung up the phone furious with myself. Thank you? *Thank you?*

I went home, kissed my mother, and told her Mrs. Lee and I were getting along fine. I grabbed my Rollerblades before she could ask me any questions and speedskated through the spookily empty downtown streets to Battery Park. I worked out hard, until it was time to skate back to Chinatown and give Mrs. Lee proof

that there are no happy endings.

I called Bill early the next morning. "I gave her the pictures," I said.

"How did she like them?"

"She loved them. She gave me this horrible smile—all hard around the edges, you know?—and said, 'Mother know. Mother always know best for son.' I said they weren't doing anything interesting in the picture, just talking, and that usually in this sort of situation I'd recommend keeping the surveillance going another few days."

"What'd she say?"

"She sort of smirked. 'Oh-ho, greedy girl. Not need, not pay. Plenty here. How much bill?' I worked it out and she paid, right there, in cash."

"So that's it."

"Well," I said, "well, no."

"Oh-ho," Bill said. "Masochist girl. You want follow Jill Moore more."

"That's right." I ignored his phony Chinese accent, which was really pretty good. "I know it's none of my business—"

"I'll meet you in half an hour outside her building."

I hesitated. "I'm not sure I can pay you," I said. "I mean, the case is over."

"There are other ways you could pay me."

"Yes, but I won't."

"I know. But just think of the debt you're racking up."

"Junk bonds," I said.

We followed Jill Moore for the next two days. She was taking her classes: Ming Dynasty Art; Admiral Perry and the Opening of Japan; Topics in South Asian Political History; and Women in Chinese Culture. You'd better study harder in that one, I thought. I hung around all her classrooms, and even sat in on the Ming Dynasty Art lecture. It was pretty interesting, nice slides of glazed bowls and sumptuous silk robes. I tailed her to lunch, to the bookstore, and to the library, where she hauled a thick green book and a spiral notebook out of her bag and was so deep in concentration when I walked by her that she didn't even look up. I walked by the other way, too. I just wanted to see what she was doing.

"That was a little risky," Bill said later that afternoon, in the cafe I'd come to think of as ours. It was Thursday by now, the day Kuan Cheng Lee had a seminar until seven.

"I know," I said. "I shouldn't have. I was bad."

"So what was she doing?"

"Nothing interesting. Translating very, very elementary Mandarin. Filling a notebook full of clumsy characters."

"Like me? Big coarse clumsy

foreign characters?"

"Is that still bothering you? I'm sorry I said that. I didn't mean it."

"It doesn't bother me. I just wanted to make you feel guilty."

"It's a cheap shot, making a Chinese daughter feel guilty. Anybody can do it. Oh, Bill. Oh, damn. Look."

Bill turned where I was pointing. Hurrying up MacDougal Street was the handsome Asian fellow. He had three textbooks under his arm and he was in such a rush to get to Jill Moore's doorbell that he dropped one of them on his toe as he leapt up the stoop.

"Serves him right," I announced, as we watched him hop around for a minute, then scoop up the thick green book and hit the bell. He was buzzed, limping, in.

"That's unworthy," Bill reprimanded me. I didn't listen, because I'd just had a thought.

I wanted to tell Bill about it—god, I hoped I was right!—but I didn't get the chance. As I opened my mouth, Kuan Cheng Lee raced down the sidewalk and up the same stoop. He let himself in the vestibule door, but not before his jacket blew open in a gust of wind.

He had a gun.

Bill must have seen it, too,

because he jumped from the table at the same time I did. We charged out the cafe door, leaving the elegant waiter open-mouthed.

By the time we got to the vestibule the door was closed, and we lost seconds trying to be buzzed in. You always can in New York and eventually we did, but not before my heart was pounding crazily and I'd caught such an adrenaline rush that I wanted to kick the door in myself.

Bill went first because he can take stairs two at a time. I dashed up straight flights and around landings after him. A baby howled behind a door. Bill's footsteps thumped over my lighter, faster ones: then the sound of his changed as he hit the fourth floor and ran down the hall. He was almost at the front apartment's door when we heard a shot.

If you hadn't known, it could have been carpentry, hammer hitting wood. But he knew. Bill pounded on the door. "Police! Open up!" Crude, but effective. All sound stopped within.

I reached the door. "Lee Kuan Cheng!" I called. "It's Lydia Chin. Let me in. Don't shoot again."

Bill and I flattened ourselves on either side of the door, guns drawn, backs against the wall. Down the hall a door cracked,

a face peered out. "Police!" Bill barked. "Get back inside!"

The face retreated hastily.

"Someday you'll get in trouble for that," I whispered.

"I always do."

"Can you break it in?"

He looked at the door, nodded.

"Kuan Cheng!" I called again. "Let me in! Let me talk to you. Don't hurt anyone, Kuan Cheng."

Nothing happened. Bill's eyes met mine. He backed a little, then threw himself against the unsuspecting door. It shuddered; he did it again, harder, and the door flew open, hinges shrieking. Bill went in low with it. I dived in even lower, so that any bullets Kuan Cheng fired would have a chance to miss us in the empty doorway.

But he didn't fire any. He stood in the kitchen, maybe eight feet from us, face twisted in anger and fear. His skin was shiny with sweat. He held his elbows locked, his gun gripped in both shaking hands. Bill and I held guns on him, too, which meant if we were lucky one of us would survive this.

Great.

"Kuan Cheng, don't," I said. "Put it down." I wasn't sure he could hear me over the beating of my heart.

He spoke. "She took a lover!" His voice was loud and hoarse.

"Not even married yet, and she took a lover. Humiliated me everywhere! My *mother* knows! I'll kill her. I'll kill them both!"

"No," I said.

"No," a woman's cracked voice came from the shadowed room behind Kuan Cheng. "No!"

I peered down the hallway to the living room. In the fading light from the windows I saw Jill Moore kneeling, her arms wrapped protectively around the other man, the handsome Asian, whose white shirt showed a dark stain at the shoulder. His eyes were wide open with fear.

"Please!" Jill Moore's high, quavering voice was close to hysterical. "Kuan Cheng! It's not what you think!"

"Oh, no?" He whipped the gun in their direction, and his skin flushed darker.

"No," I said, grabbing for his attention. He was close to hysterical, too, and the sight of the other man in Jill Moore's arms wouldn't do him any good. "Kuan Cheng, he's not her lover."

He spun back to me. "Not her lover?" he sneered. "What, her younger brother?"

"No," I said. "He's her Mandarin teacher."

Disbelief, confusion, and anger chased each other across his face.

"Jill!" I yelled. "Am I right?"

"Yes!" she called. Her voice cracked again. "Kuan Cheng, I was going to surprise you. I didn't want you to know until I could speak it well." She made a small sobbing sound.

Kuan Cheng, his gun still trained on me, his body rigid and tense, glanced quickly into the living room, then back to me. He said nothing.

I stood slowly, lowered my gun, and put it in my belt clip. I looked at Bill. Sweat beaded his forehead and the back of his hands as he answered my look. Then he holstered his gun, too, and stood up.

God, I thought, if you shoot now, Kuan Cheng, shoot me, because I couldn't live with the guilt. Kuan Cheng didn't shoot anybody. He didn't put his gun down, either. He didn't move, just stood, paralyzed by indecision and disbelief.

"Kuan Cheng?" Jill's voice was clearer, though soft. "It was for your mother. I wanted her to like me."

Kuan Cheng laughed a short wild laugh. "My mother? That's ridiculous. What makes you think my mother will like you if you speak Mandarin?"

Jill said. "Because she said so."

My blood froze. No one spoke. There was silence everywhere.

Jill hurried on, trying to

reach him. "That day at her apartment? She said if I learned to speak her language I'd be showing the proper respect. Then she'd accept me as a daughter-in-law. I mean, she never said she'd like me, but I thought it was a beginning. I wanted it to be as right as I could make it." In the dusk a tear glistened on her cheek.

"My mother said that?" Kuan Cheng whispered.

"Yes. She even found Chyi-Jou to teach me. We started that week."

"My god," I said low, unbelieving. I looked at Bill. Anger shone in his eyes; his jaw was tight. He knew, too. I said it anyway. "We were set up."

He nodded.

In the darkness of Jill Moore's apartment, Kuan Cheng lowered his gun.

We stopped the bleeding from Chyi-Jou Kwong's shoulder, called an ambulance, and concocted a story: Kuan Cheng had bought the gun for Jill, for protection. Neither of them knew how to use it, and it went off. Bill and I were on our way there, just for a visit, because I'm an old friend of Kuan Cheng's. We heard the shot and assumed there was trouble, thus the scene in the hallway.

We pulled it off, though it was sort of a pain, Bill and me

at the 6th Precinct for an hour answering the same questions separately until the cops gave up. Kuan Cheng was arrested for gun possession, but Chyi-Jou Kwong wasn't badly hurt and Kuan Cheng was a model of upwardly-mobile Asian youth. A good lawyer would be able to wiggle him out of anything serious. I was mad enough to let him figure his own way out of spending the night in jail, but Bill pointed out that it was our licenses on the line if Kuan Cheng, in his perilous emotional state, blew the story.

So I called Mrs. Lee and told her where he was and what had happened, and suggested she send him a lawyer fast.

"How'd she take it?" Bill asked as we left the police station. Tenth Street was carpeted with fallen leaves; streetlights shone gently on brick row-houses. It all seemed lovely and peaceful, but I was cold. And I knew that behind those cosy facades lurked legions of mothers gleefully plotting to doublecross their sons.

"She wailed. She yelled. She called him a stupid boy. She said it was all the white witch's fault. Then she said it was all *my* fault. Then I hung up on her."

"Without telling her where to get off?"

"Well," I admitted, "I told her a little bit where to get off. Because it won't get around and embarrass my mother. From now on, I guarantee Mrs. Lee will pretend she never heard of me."

We stopped at a corner to let a car drift past.

"How did you know?" Bill asked. "That he was teaching her Mandarin."

"The book he dropped on his toe. It was the same one she was translating Mandarin from at the library. She's not taking any Mandarin courses, so I guessed he was her tutor. But I never guessed Mrs. Lee had set us all up."

Bill said nothing, just lit a cigarette and let me go on, thinking sad thoughts out loud.

"The thing is," I said, "I can't believe a mother would do that. Do you know what she said, when I called her on it?"

"Tell me."

"'Mother know best for son. White witch bad wife, undutiful daughter-in-law.' That was all she cared about—that Jill Moore wasn't the daughter-in-law of her dreams. What kind of mother is that?"

"Human," Bill said. "Flawed. Too desperate to see past herself."

"Desperate?" I snorted.

"Selfish. Diabolical. Manipulative. A classic Chinese mother."

"Is your mother like that?"

"Of course not! Just because she doesn't like *you*—"

"Will it help if I learn Cantonese?"

I stopped, looked at him, and laughed. Then I hugged him.

When we started forward again the night wasn't as cold and the houses weren't as hostile.

"Maybe it's not that I don't understand white people," I said. "Maybe I don't understand anybody."

"Who does?"

"You do. Here's this woman who sets up her own son, and he almost kills a whole bunch of people including us, and you just say, 'She's human.'"

"That doesn't mean I understand her. Just that I know not to expect too much."

"Maybe nobody understands anybody." That thought made me cold again.

Bill took my hand. "Come on." We turned up a quiet street. "There's a cafe with a fireplace, where they play Vi-  
valdi. I'll buy you a hot apple  
cider."

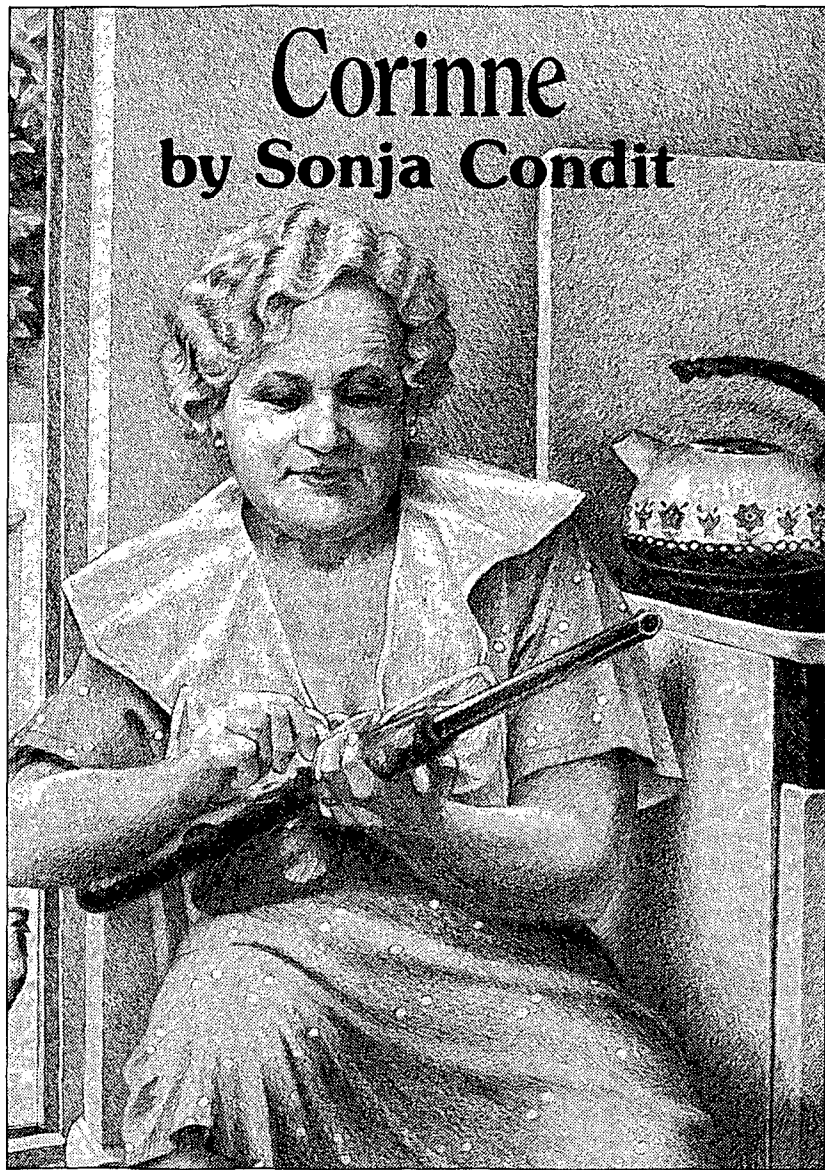
I didn't have to say anything because he was reading my mind.



FICTION

# Corinne

by Sonja Condit



*Illustration by Laurie Harden*

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“Mother, you did not,” said Helen.  
“Yes, I did,” said Corinne.  
“You couldn’t have.”

“Right between the eyes.” Corinne contemplated her act with obvious satisfaction. “With his hunting rifle. Brains all over the yard. Chickens ate most of it. Not,” said Corinne, “that there was much by way of brains. Your father was not too bright, Helen dear. It grieves me to say it, but it’s true. You got your brains from my side of the family.” She looked at her daughter and added, “Your looks, too. You were lucky.”

“Mother,” said Helen, “I realize this is a difficult time for you, with Dad running away, but I really think—”

“He didn’t run away,” said Corinne. “He didn’t have time. Never knew what hit him. Poor Donny.”

Helen got up and went to the kitchen. “You want a cup of tea, Mother?” she called back.

“That would be nice, dear,” said Corinne. She sat in the living room, looking at the wedding portrait on the opposite wall: Donny and Corinne, all those years ago. Donny in his rented tuxedo, with his bow tie crooked; Corinne in the white polyester dress she had made herself. It had never fit right, but it looked good in the picture. Looking at the picture, she could smell the cologne Donny had used; he’d used about half a pint of it, and he’d smelled like furniture polish for a month.

All those years. Poor Donny. She shook her head over her crocheting as she hooked another row. Poor, poor Donny. She should have shot him at once and spared him half a lifetime of misery.

She could have spared herself some misery, too. But she didn’t think of herself, she thought only of him. It was her Christian duty to put him out of his misery. Husband and wife were, according to Paul, one flesh; Christ had recommended plucking out offending right eyes. The conclusion was obvious. Corinne read her Bible. She knew what was what.

She’d waited forty years; forty years ago she’d married him, and almost at once she’d known that he’d have to be put down sooner or later. It was a terrible thing, the taking of a life; it was a deep and solemn responsibility, but she’d done it at last.

Poor Donny.

“Mother, not another afghan?” said Helen, bringing in Corinne’s tea—hot and sweet and nearly black, just as Corinne liked it. Thoughtful Helen! “You’ve got a thousand by now, surely?” Which

was Helen's thoughtful way of saying that she didn't want her mother to give her another afghan.

"This isn't for you," said Corinne. "Jessie Landover's son Arnold is getting married. It's a wedding present."

"Arnie Landover's getting married?" said Helen, glad to be diverted from the subject of her father's disappearance. "Who to?"

"Jeanne Morris, you know Jeanne, from town?"

"Oh, sure. She's a nice girl. When's the wedding?"

"Couple of weeks. So Jessie's all alone at last, except for John. Kids're all gone, all married and gone. About time, too." She hooked and caught the yellow wool; the afghan grew as she spoke. No one could crochet faster than Corinne. It was not true that she had a thousand afghans; she had made two hundred thirty-one, and most of these she had given away to a shelter for the homeless in Denver. "Now, me," said Corinne, "I'm all alone, all by myself. There's not even Donny any more."

"Now, Mother," said Helen bracingly, "you know perfectly well that Dad's not dead. He left town, he just drove out and ran away from home. Pretty soon he'll realize what a mistake he's made and he'll come back, you know he will. They found his truck in Denver, Mother, you know that."

"I know where he is," said Corinne. "I drove the truck to Denver myself, and I took the bus back to Rifle and Jessie came and drove me home. I took Donny to the city all by myself, and I donated him to a soup kitchen. He was three different kinds of stew, and a lot of liver and onions, and a steak and kidney pie. They were very grateful."

Helen's teacup clattered in its saucer as she put it down. "Mother, how *could* you?"

"Waste not, want not," said Corinne piously. "People are hungry. It's my Christian duty."

"Dear God," said Helen. "What about the bones?"

"Boiled them down for stock. Will you pass me my scissors, dear?"

"Mother, you need help. This is *such* a sick fantasy."

Someone knocked at the front door: the sheriff, dropping in on his way home to see if Mrs. Stone needed anything. Helen stood on the porch, pulled the screen door shut behind her, and ran her hands through her hair. "She's feeling fine, only she has this horrible idea—"

The sheriff nodded wisely. "She's turned herself in twice already.

'Course, we just give her a cup of coffee and drive her home. She likes it with sirens and lights. Guess she gets lonely out here all by herself. Terrible thing, taking off the way he did. They say he didn't even leave a note."

"It's true," said Helen. "I'm going back to Denver tonight; do you think you can keep an eye on her and give me a call if she starts acting strangely or anything?"

"Be glad to," said the sheriff.

"I don't think there's anything really wrong with her," said Helen hastily, "only she's so upset—well, I do appreciate it." She waited until the sheriff's car had vanished in the dust of the gravel road, then waited a minute longer to look at the trees. The aspens were all copper and bronze on the valley slopes, just as pretty this autumn as they had ever been. Helen knew this land so well that she looked at it without seeing; but sometimes she saw it as clearly as a stranger would. It was good land, good quiet land, good rich land, this green river valley, the best grazing land in the county. She looked down at the cattle in the grass, the haystacks larger than houses, the barns, the river.

"Mother," she said, going back inside, "what about the ranch?"

Corinne had thought of that. "I can do the work I've always done, keeping the house and the garden and the chickens, and doing all the buying and the selling and the taxes, and I've hired young Arnie Landover to do the work poor Donny did. He and Jeanne can have the old house. Don't you worry about the ranch, it's not going anywhere, and the price of beef is high this year. Donny would have been pleased. Oh, poor Donny."

"Why do you say you killed him?" said Helen.

"I don't like to keep a secret of what I did," said Corinne. "I don't like to lie and pretend, like it was a sin. It was the right thing to do, and I'm not ashamed of it."

Helen's tea was cold and bitter by now; she made a face and put it down. "Weren't you happy with him?"

The crochet hook slowed. "Happy?" said Corinne slowly. "We had a good life, I guess. It's hard work. Cattle's not easy, and there's always something—a bad year for hay, or a disease in the herd—and the hunters kill a few of them every year. Always the best ones, too. But it wasn't bad. No, it wasn't too bad a life, dear, but I had to kill your father."

"Why?"

"It was time. He had bad habits, and he couldn't be broke of

them. Forty years I was married to that man, and I couldn't break him of those habits. You'd shoot a dog that was in that condition. Heaven knows it was my Christian duty to be patient, and I was patient for forty mortal years, but it came time at last. I knew it sure as if the angels of the Lord had said it in my ear. Which they didn't, but I knew it all the same."

Helen tried to think of her father's bad habits. To her he seemed a remarkably, almost oppressively, pure-living man: he wouldn't even take cough syrup because of the alcohol in it. "What did he do?"

The crochet hook stabbed the wool, and Corinne had to look down at her work for the first time that day to see what she had done wrong. "He ate preserves out of order," she said. "He ate the new preserves first; but you have to eat last year's preserves before this year's or they go bad. He ate peas right out of the garden and I never knew if I had enough or not. He blew his nose in his kitchen napkin. He wore his dirty socks to bed and he took them off in the middle of the night and he left them all bunched up in the sheets. And he tickled me."

Helen had no recollection of her father's other sins, but she knew about the tickling. She remembered how it was: Helen and her brothers on the couch, giggling with delight, while Corinne washed dishes at the kitchen sink and Donny crept up behind her, hands outstretched, fingers curved: Crash! Shriek! Dishes shattered on the floor, Corinne screaming, Donny laughing—what fun!

For forty years? Maybe she really *had* killed him.

Of course not! Helen got a grip on herself. "Mother," she said, "look, you can't talk about this kind of thing. Everybody knows you didn't kill Dad, but what if they hear you talking about it? What would people say? They'd think you were going crazy. They'd think you were a crazy old lady who had to be put away. You wouldn't want that, now would you, Mother?"

Corinne thought about it. "No, I wouldn't want that."

Helen put her coat on. "And I really have to go, Mother, I have to be at work tomorrow, but I'll call you when I get home, okay? Goodbye!"

Jessie Landover came by the next day to admire the afghan. "They'll like it," she said. "Jeanne's a real nice girl. And Arnie's ready to start work any time after the honeymoon. You've got help till then, don't you?"

"I'll get by," said Corinne. "Where are they going?"

"Aspen. Jeanne's folks gave them a week at some hotel. It's real nice. Kind of hard to be left all alone with John, though."

Corinne offered Jessie a plate of chocolate chip cookies. "All those years," she suggested.

"All those years," sighed Jessie. "And he still sings that song." "What song?"

"He only knows one song. 'You Are My Sunshine,' day in, day out, winter and summer."

"Can't break him of it?" said Corinne.

"Never could," said Jessie. "That's real pretty wrapping paper."

"It's left over from Christmas. But there's no holly berries or Santa Clauses on it, it's just silver, so it'll do for a wedding, I guess."

"It's real pretty. And you wrap it so neatly. It'll be the prettiest present they get, even before they open it. You got a card to go with it, Corinne?"

"Not yet. I'm going to town tomorrow, I'll get one then."

Jessie took the package and hesitated in the doorway. The aspens glowed on the slope behind her, and the river valley resounded with the gossip of the leaves. "Corinne," she said shyly. "Corinne, you got the address of that soup kitchen in Denver? I think I might make a donation one of these days."

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FICTION



# The Meeting Comes to Order

by Robert Cenedella

Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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**A**fter dinner, Delia, whose turn it had been to cook that dinner, simply sat on the couch in the living room, waiting for the nightly meeting to start.

This would not happen until her cousin Ambrose, whose turn it was to wash dishes, had taken care of that chore, by which time their cousin Victor, doing *his* Tuesday night task, would have arranged the two straight-backed chairs here in the living room to face the rather tall easy chair behind the tiny desk under Grampy's portrait on the wall opposite the barred windows. It was in that easy chair that tonight's presiding chairman would sit.

Delia sighed. It had been quite a long time, really, she thought, since the first of these meetings. In the mirror this morning she had noticed three more gray hairs, and there might be a few besides those at the back of her head. Ambrose, she realized, stooped a little these days, and Victor, energetic Victor, sometimes seemed actually tired. But Delia herself was happy—wasn't she? And weren't Ambrose and Victor happy, too? Of course they were. Of course, yes.

Ambrose came finally from the kitchen into the living room, wiping his hands with a paper towel which he tossed into the wastebasket.

"Whose turn is it to be chairman?" he asked.

"Mine," said Victor.

"Oh yes," said Ambrose. "Well, are we ready?"

"Ready," said Delia, "and I do hope we come up with a new theory tonight." She rose from the couch and went to the right-hand straight-back, while to her left, Ambrose sat down beside her.

Victor slowly marched to the space between the easy chair and the desk, stood there looking solemnly at his cousins, then lifted the paperweight and pounded the desktop with it, *knock knock knock*.

"The meeting will please come to order," he said.

At that moment the doorbell rang.

Startled, all three looked toward the front hall.

"Who can it be?" said Delia.

"My God!" said Ambrose. "The grocery boy came yesterday."

Victor said: "Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name . . ."

"Who is it? Who? Who?" cried Ambrose.

On the porch outside, ringing the doorbell, was Rex Wilcox, and



he was puzzled. He had been in town only an hour or two—and that was after two years and three months in the wilds around the Amazon—but already he found himself baffled.

When he had taken the bus north from New York without first calling anyone, he had been looking forward to surprising his cousins, Delia and Victor and Ambrose—and they could all, he felt, have such a good time (on him; his treat) after more than two years of being out of touch. Maybe Rex would even invite Grampy.

But when he had got off the bus at the Main Street depot and, after checking his bag in a locker there, had gone two blocks in the twilight to the well-remembered Quality Cafeteria and, before sitting down to dinner, had gone to the phone booth and looked up numbers for Delia, for Ambrose, and for Victor, he found no listing for them. Information confirmed that they had no phones, and when he then asked for Grampy's number, he was told it was unlisted, was not to be given out to anyone.

Well!

So after he had eaten, shaking his puzzled head the while, he had come here to Grampy's fine house—and behold, the once beautiful lawn was now a veritable wilderness, with grass as high as one's head, except that of course it bent downward like an elderly, unwashed, uncared-for, barely living thing, which, really, was what it was, damn it.

But there was a lighted room in this seemingly deserted house, and so, after he had stopped puzzling over the fact that there were bars at all the windows, Rex went up the steps to the porch, and rang the bell. He waited not long, really, then rang it again.

In the living room, Victor was saying, "... Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven . . . "

And the doorbell rang yet again.

Ambrose said, "Look, we have to answer the door."

"Amen," said Victor, and crossed himself. Then: "Have we all got our keys?"

Delia took a key from her handbag, and each man took a key from his pocket; then, nervously glancing at each other, they went into the hallway. Stopped. Looked at each other.

Ambrose said, "This isn't a trick one of you is playing, is it?"

"No, I swear," said Delia.

"We're as apprehensive as you are, Ambrose," said Victor.

The doorbell was ringing again.

"Well . . . ready?" said Ambrose.

"Yes. But I'm scared," said Delia.

They all moved up close to the door, and Ambrose, the tallest, put his key in the special lock half an arm's length above his head, while Delia crouched low in front of Victor and put her key into the knee-high lock. Victor leaned over her and put his key into what had been the original lock, just below the doorknob.

"All right," said Ambrose. "One . . . two . . . three!" and each unlocked one of the locks. Then they stood up, stood back, and Victor seized Delia's waist with both hands, while Delia seized Ambrose the same way, and Victor said, "Ready? Go!" And Ambrose opened the door as the others pulled him back, farther inside.

There was Rex. Cousin Rex!

"Ambrose!" said Rex. "Victor! And . . . is that you, Delia? What's going on here?"

"Come in, come in," said Ambrose. And when Rex had stepped farther into the hallway: "All right, let's lock the door now."

He slammed the door shut, and the three of them stepped past Rex, and ("One, two, three," said Ambrose) in perfect unison each locked his or her lock. Then they all turned, smiling, toward their open-mouthed cousin.

"What the hell is going on here?" asked Rex.

"Come in! Come in! Come on into the living room," said Victor. And he and Ambrose, smiling, backed through the living room door, as Delia, saying *Oh, it's so good to have you here, Rex*, led him in their wake.

Victor had already pushed the large, scarcely-ever-used easy chair from the window into a spot from which one would be able to look at Victor when he would take the chairman's seat, and then, with a mere turn of the head, at Delia and Ambrose side by side.

"Your seat," Victor said to Rex, and then he himself marched to take his place beneath Grampy's picture. The others sat, too, Rex last of all, hesitantly.

And then Rex spoke. "Look," he said. "What was all that about the three locks? Each of you with a key. What *is* that all about?"

"Oh, we'll explain. It's delightful to have you here," said Ambrose.

"Maybe you'll come up with a new theory," said Delia.

"New theory? About what?"

"About Grampy's murder," said Victor.

Rex looked at Victor, then at the others. His head was shaking. "My God," he said. "*Murder?*"

"We'd have let you know," said Delia, "but you were off there in the wilds, and . . ." She spread her hands and shrugged.

"God," said Rex. "When did it happen? How? My God, *who?*"

"That's what we're trying to find out," said Ambrose. "*Who*, I mean. *Who*. *When* is very important, too. You know when it happened?"

"Tell me."

"The day after you left for the Amazon. Anthropology, you were interested in, right? Or botany? *Some* darned thing quite scientific, right?"

"Archaeology."

"Ah, yes. Well, on the day after you left . . ."

"Wait a minute!" It was Victor speaking. "We have not declared, since Rex interrupted us, that this is a meeting. It should be a meeting, conducted formally, according to Robert's Rules of Order."

"Oh yes!" said Delia.

"Yes indeed," said Ambrose.

"What the hell is going on here?" said Rex. "Grampy's dead? He was murdered? I mean, well, the police must have . . ."

"Order! Order!" Victor glared at him. "You do not have the floor." He lifted the paperweight and pounded it. *Rap rap rap*. Then: "The chair recognizes Delia Wilcox for the purpose of informing latecomers about Grampy's murder."

"Oh," said Delia. "Well," said Delia. "Look," said Delia, "the simple fact is that sometime the day after Rex's leaving for the Amazon, somebody came into this house, where Grampy was all alone, and this intruder, whether Grampy knew him or not, managed to get behind Grampy and hit him hard hard hard on the skull with what the police called a blunt instrument, finally killing him."

Rex said, "My God!"

Victor said, "You are out of order." And seeing Ambrose's raised hand: "The chair recognizes Ambrose Wilcox."

"What the hell," Rex said. "I want . . ."

"Order! Order!" said Victor. "Ambrose?"

"Well," said Ambrose, "I think we should remind the newcomer of the last time we saw Grampy. It was early in the afternoon . . ."

"Wait!" Hand raised, Delia said, "Would the speaker yield for a moment?"

"Ambrose?" said Victor.

"I yield," said Ambrose.

"Well . . ." Delia rose, apparently so excited by her idea that she could not simply sit, she needs must move. "Mr. Chairman, look: night after night you and Ambrose and I have gone over the last time we all saw Grampy . . ."

"Most likely," said Chairman Victor Wilcox, "the last time all but one of us saw Grampy."

"Yes. Yes. Probably. But what I'm suggesting," said Delia, "is that it might be useful to all of us to hear how our visitor, Rex, remembers that last meeting. I mean he might remember it differently from the way we do."

Rex said sarcastically, "You want me actually to open my mouth and say something? *Talk?*"

"You're out of order!" said Victor. Then, to Delia: "You want to yield to Rex?"

"Yes," said Delia.

"Any objection, Ambrose?"

"No, Mr. Chairman."

"Then," said Victor, "Rex, you have the floor—solely, I must remind you, for the purpose of setting before this meeting your best recollection of the last time we were all together with Grampy."

"All right. All right," said Rex, and stood up. "But first, Victor, for God's sake . . ."

Victor pounded the paperweight. "You will address me as chairman," he said.

"Oh, my God! All right, look, chairman, I came here tonight because I love you all. And before we get into what happened the last time we were all together in this room with Grampy, I want to say, in view of the fact that you have three locks on the door, and that I have to call you chairman instead of Victor or just plain Vic, that our family is and always has been, to put it mildly, unstable. You all remember Uncle Otis—your father, Ambrose—who said he knew how to change gold into base metals . . ."

"But . . . excuse me, Mr. Chairman," said Ambrose, "but my father *did* know how. He *did* change gold into base metals, time after time."

"Uh-huh," said Rex. "But the trouble was, it wasn't worth doing. All his and your mother's gold became tin, and they became poorer and poorer until, Ambrose, your family had to go on relief. And every branch of our family did crazy things like that. What I'm

saying, lady and gentleman and chairman, formerly Delia and Ambrose and Victor, is that our Wilcox family has a streak of eccentricity that amounts sometimes to our being bonkers."

"That remark is out of order," said Victor.

"But true," said Rex.

"Does the gentleman who has the floor wish to tell how he remembers our last afternoon with Grampy, or does he yield?"

"All right, all right," said Rex. "Our last meeting with Grampy—when, incidentally, he gave us further evidence of craziness in this family. I was packing for my trip to the Amazon when I got a call from him that morning. A Saturday, right? And Grampy said he wanted me and all of you here in this room that afternoon at two. Okay. My plane left at night, so I came. I met you, Victor, outside. We greeted Grampy when he opened the door to us, but he said nothing, just motioned us to this room. Delia was already here, and as we entered, she put her finger to her lips as if to say *shush*. We sat in silence for about five minutes until Ambrose came. Same *shush shush* nonsense with him, then Grampy went to where you're sitting, Victor—I mean Mr. for God's sake Chairman—and he told us why we were here. You, Delia, were engaged to Tom Haskell, right? Well, Grampy started with you—said that a woman in her thirties was too old to get married, and that you'd have to move in here with him in his old age and cook and sew and wash the floor, or else he'd cut you out of his will. Okay? Then me. He said I was a damned fool doing all these scholarly things for the university and now taking leave for two years to investigate the archaeological leads I'd got from those studies, and he declared I'd have to move in here and take care of all correspondence for him, and catalogue his books, et cetera, or else I'd be cut out of his will.

"Then you, Victor J. Chairman! You had asked Grampy for a loan to help you expand your dry goods store over there in Hopkinton. Well, he told you that you'd have to shut down your business altogether and come live here with him and take care of his financial problems—investments, bill paying, et cetera. Otherwise, you too would be cut out of his will. And Ambrose, you, well, he wanted you to give up that job you had with the real estate firm and come here, live here, take care of the lawn and the garden and all kinds of car and machine repair jobs—or else you'd be cut out of the will, too. Ah, and then he read the will to us. With all the investing he had done, and the profits from the manufacture of reapers and

sewing machines and what-the-hell that his company had made throughout his life, and the net capital gains from the *sale* of all that, why, he had liquid assets of more than forty million dollars—and each of us was to get ten million, right? The will said so. But *now* he said that if we didn't do what he commanded, move in and serve him for the rest of his life, why, he'd rewrite that will the following Monday—two days from then—and we'd get nothing. Okay? That's it, isn't it?"

Delia raised her hand, and Victor said, "Delia?"

"Mr. Chairman," said Delia, "the previous speaker has recited the facts as I remember them, up to the time when he himself made answer to Grampy."

"Oh, well," said Rex, "I told him he could keep his . . ."

"You do not have the floor," said Victor.

Delia said, "Mr. Chairman, I yield to Mr. Rex Wilcox."

"You have the floor," said Victor to Rex.

"Oh, my God! Victor! All right, all right—chairman. I don't have to tell you what I did. I told him he could keep his ten million bucks, and that I had a plane to catch, and I said good-goddamned-bye, and I left. Right?"

"Ambrose?" said Chairman Victor.

"He's right, Mr. Chairman," said Ambrose. "That's how I remember it."

"And," said Victor, "the chair now informs our newcomer that after he left, the rest of us all said that we were *uncertain* what to do. Delia wanted to get married. Ambrose liked his real estate job. I wanted to go on running my store. But none of us wanted to give up ten million dollars. We said so, and Grampy said that since you, Rex, had renounced your ten million, he'd give *us* your share, and so we would now get thirteen million, three hundred and thirty-three thousand, three hundred and thirty-three dollars and thirty-three and a third cents apiece, and did we want to renounce *that*? And we shook our heads, and Delia cried a little, and I cried a little, and Ambrose threw his hands in the air, and then we all said we needed more time. And Grampy looked at his watch, saw that it was now four-oh-seven P.M., and announced that he would give us thirty-one hours and fifty-three minutes, no more, to make up our minds. The next night, Sunday, we would have to come here at seven sharp and say yes or no to him, and the day after that, Monday morning, he'd make all necessary changes in his will." Victor raised the paperweight and pounded the desk, *rap*. One

rap. "Then," he said, "the next morning, someone came here and murdered him."

"And his will stayed in effect," said Rex. "Wow!"

"You're out of order," said Victor, and rapped three raps this time, then said, "His will stayed in effect."

Delia said, "Mr. Chairman," and, as Victor nodded, went on: "I think our newcomer should know that, with no fingerprints but ours, and no evidence of a break-in, and the existence of strong motivation on the part of all of us three, why, then, either Ambrose or you, Mr. Chairman, or I committed that murder. The police think so, too, but they could not pin it down to any one of us, and so . . ." She simply spread her hands and smiled sadly.

"And so," said Chairman Victor, "we took up residence here in Grampy's house, which is now ours, and we have been seeking for two years now to solve the mystery of his death. Any questions?"

"Well," said Rex, "you're all living here on the money Grampy left. My question is, since the will wasn't changed, do I get my ten mill, too?"

"The chair can inform you that like our inheritance, yours is in a trust fund with Grampy's lawyer as trustee. The interest comes to us once a month. Yours, of course, has been simply accruing."

"Whee," said Rex. "Another question, Mr. Chairman?" And, when Victor nodded: "Do any of you ever *leave* here?"

"No. We have arrangements with the supermarket, the bank, the pharmacy, the liquor store, et cetera, for deliveries on a regular basis. We stay here always. We play cards and Scrabble. We read, we look at television in the den, and . . . well, any other questions?"

"You keep each other prisoner, is that it?"

"Indeed. Why, clearly, one of us three must be the murderer. We have a meeting like this every night to try to determine *which* one."

Delia raised her hand. Raised it and waved it. "Mr. Chairman?"

"The chair recognizes Delia Wilcox."

Delia rose, obviously excited. "Mr. Chairman, I think I have a brand new theory."

"The chair is pleased to hear it. Kindly expound your theory."

"Well, Mr. Chairman, first I'd like to remind everybody of the problems we've had with previous theories. We're all certain that Grampy was killed on that Sunday morning at eleven nineteen A.M. One of the blows from the blunt instrument put Grampy's pocket watch out of commission, and probably on a backswing, his



small table clock was knocked to the floor. Both timepieces were stopped at eleven nineteen. With Rex long since out of town, it seemed clear that one of us three—you and I, Mr. Chairman, or Ambrose, must be the murderer. But . . . well, *we* all know it, but Cousin Rex doesn't: each of us had an iron-clad alibi. Perhaps we ought to let our guest know what those alibis were."

"The chair agrees. You may put your alibi into the record of this meeting."

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman. From eleven four to eleven forty-seven, I had been talking long distance on a person-to-person reversed-charge telephone call to my then fiancé, Tom Haskell. And of course the telephone company had a record of that."

"Mr. Chairman?" It was Rex asking for the floor. "Two things. First, that sounds like a good alibi to me. Why didn't that clear Delia?"

Victor said, "She then lived next door to this house of Grampy's, remember? She could have kept the line open for the record, with or without the connivance of her fiancé, and could have run across the lawn with a baseball bat to kill Grampy."

"Ouch," said Rex.

Chairman Victor said, "You said two things. What is the second one?"

"Well," said Rex, "I wonder what's happened to Delia's engagement to Tom? I yield to her, Mr. Chairman, for the answer."

"Well," said Delia, "after we'd been trying to solve the mystery for, oh, only about six months, and of course hadn't let Tom in here at all, why, one day he shoved a letter for me under the door, telling me he was going to marry, for God's sake, that . . . that . . . that *harpy*, Linda Brady. Can you *imagine*?" Then, calming herself with an effort: "I give the floor to Ambrose for his alibi, Mr. Chairman."

Victor said, "Ambrose?"

Ambrose said, "Well, over at my house—right across the street, you remember—I was having coffee there on the porch when a delivery boy, Eddie Townsend, came with my groceries. I asked him if he'd like some coffee. He looked at his watch, said it was eleven-oh-two, and so yes, he had time. He sat there with me, and, well, we talked and talked until suddenly he looked at his watch again; said that, wow, it was almost noon, and left. There you are."

Victor said, "Young Eddie Townsend was questioned at length by the police. And not only did he give Ambrose an alibi, he gave

me one, too—because, as you know, I lived in the house next to Ambrose, and I was out front, trimming the lawn while Ambrose and young Eddie were on the porch talking. They saw me. Eleven-oh-two to about five minutes to twelve. Questions? Comments?”

“What if you were all in collusion, all three of you with millions of dollars to gain, and you just alibied each other?” Rex said.

“In that case,” said Victor, “not only would Delia’s Tom Haskell be in collusion with us, too—but also the delivery boy, young Eddie Townsend.”

“Hmmm . . . I see,” said Rex. “Look, I have to go now, but will you let me do one thing? Let me send a psychiatrist in here to talk to all of you.” He rose. “I’ll say goodbye now, but . . .”

Delia said, “Mr. Chairman?”

“Delia? Ah, yes, your new theory, right?”

“Yes, Mr. Chairman. My theory is that Rex did it.”

“What? That I did it? What the hell . . .”

“Order!” said Victor.

Delia said, “Rex left the day before, and we know, because the police checked it at the time, that he flew from New York to Brazil late—late, right?—on the day of the murder. But suppose he had flown back from New York early early early on the day of the murder, or never *went* until after the murder, and then, wow! Back he comes now, and there’s ten million dollars waiting for him.”

“For God’s sake!” said Rex. “If you say that, I’m going to say that one of you three did it and deliberately set back the timepieces to an hour when he could be alibied.”

“Oh! Oh! Mr. Chairman,” said Delia, “I love to see Rex getting into the spirit of things that way.”

“For God’s sake! You crazy people! Look, I’m getting out of here right now, and . . .”

“How?” asked Victor. “Getting out how?”

“What do you mean?”

“The door’s locked. Three different people have three different keys needed to open it. The windows are barred. You’re not getting out, Rex. You’re one of us. You’re a suspect.”

“What the hell . . .”

Victor rapped the table with the paperweight. “The meeting will come to order,” he said.

Rex stared at him for a long moment, then two tears rolled from his eyes, one tear down each cheek . . .

# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH

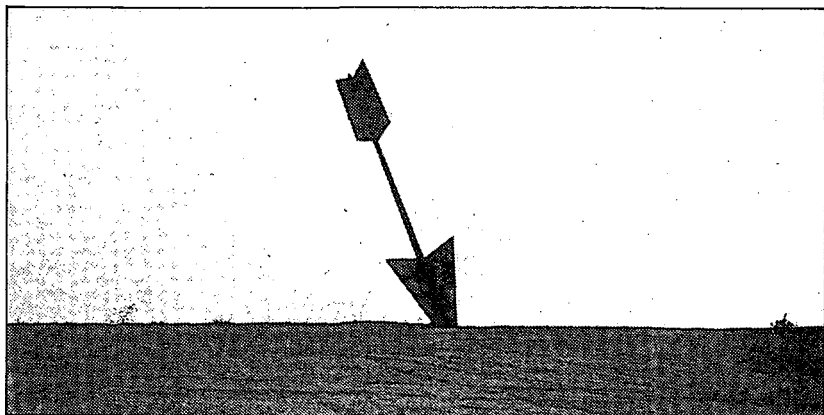


Photo by Bob Adelman/Magnum

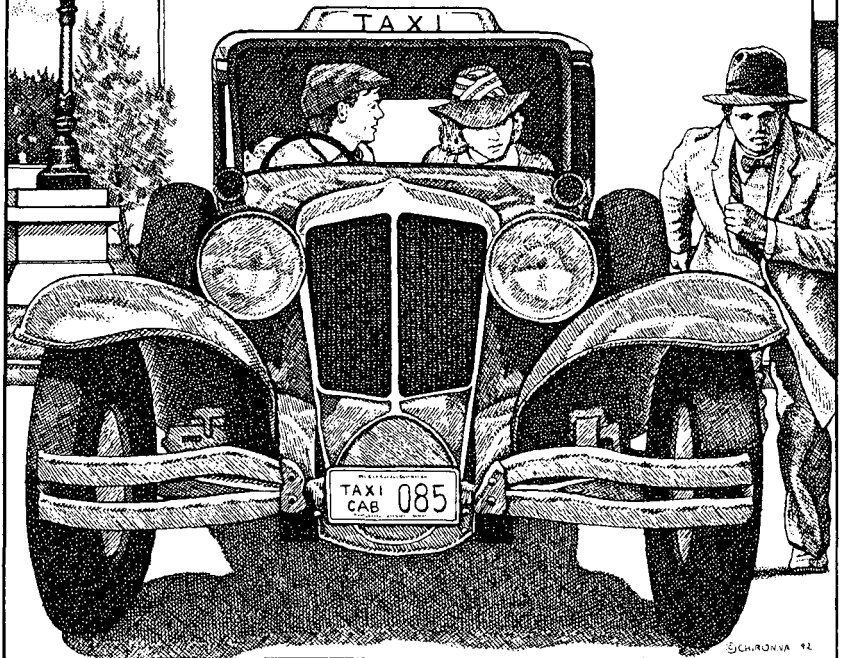
Let's hope he knows not where. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less, and be sure to include a crime), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10168-0035. Please label your entry "December Contest," and be sure your name and address are written on the story you submit.

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The winning entry for the July Mysterious Photograph contest will be found on page 155.

# The Case of the Taxicab Murders

by Robert P. Jordan



Anyone looking out the windows of the exclusive Chesterton Club that early Sunday morning in February, 1933, would have easily seen the melded form of a horse and rider attain the heights of the lone, nearby hill-

ock and come to a stop. Clouds of steam blew from the horse's nostrils; indicating that the gelding had been ridden at a faster gait than a walk. In fact, the man had pushed the animal into a half-hour trot that took them to all the corners of

Grave's End Heath accessible by horse. The rider had timed his arrival at the hillock's summit precisely after a cool-down walk of five minutes' duration.

Ian McEwen, recently promoted to police inspector from uniformed constable, had come alone to ride his favourite mount, Tomalin, from among those available at the Chesterton Club's stable. Though the Chesterton was a private club with its membership restricted to the peerage, Inspector McEwen and his family were allowed to use the stables as a partial, informal thanks for his having solved the murders of two of the club's members. The other, official part of his thanks had been his unusually rapid rise from bobby to inspector. He had been promoted over several more senior constables, and there had been ill feelings because of it. For that reason, he had been assigned away from his old station on Selby Street. His promotion had also ruffled the sensibilities of several men at Scotland Yard. So his mentor, Senior Inspector Sir Michael Berglin, had effected his transferal to Reigate, where no one had been incommoded by his promotion. It also meant a long commute each workday from the comfortable flat in London where he resided with his wife Ezme and their three

sons. The middle son, James, had been scheduled to go riding with his father after church, but the influenza had laid low all but Ian and Francis, his eldest son. Francis, though given the option to come riding, had decided to sleep late and stay warm. He was the most bookish and least enthusiastic of Ian's sons when it came to horses, and the blustery, clear weather of the previous week was enough to make Francis opt for home.

Ian bent forward slightly in the saddle and crossed his forearms over the pommel. He drew in all the sights and sounds about him. The smell of the warm horse and leather tack filled his prominent Roman nose. He was at peace here, astride a horse, or at home among his sometimes boisterous family. Ian knew he should take the gelding back to the stable, groom him out, and put him away dry. But he lingered on the hillock. Going back to the stable meant this respite from the worries of work would end.

The only crimes he had so far investigated at Reigate were petty. He reasoned that the huge prison in Reigate probably frightened off many a serious ne'er-do-well. When he'd been a constable, Ian was at least able to walk about his pa-

trol area and mingle with the common folk. He had also been on a waiting list to join the mounted constabulary, but he had given up that dream to become an inspector at Sir Michael's urging. After a few months of paperwork and petty larcenies, which were rarely solved, Ian felt he had made a mistake in accepting the promotion. He earned a bit more money, but the extended hours and responsibilities were not compensated. The one interesting crime that had lately taken place in Reigate, a taxicab driver claiming he had been assaulted and robbed by two women, had been assigned to another inspector.

As he rued his lot in life, Ian noticed Tomalin's head shift to the side and his ears turn forward. Looking down off the hillock in the direction Tomalin indicated, the policeman could see a man of short, slender stature coming out a back door of the stable building. The man wore trousers over his woolies, and his braces hung loose and draped over either hip. He held a ceramic mug in one hand and waved to Ian with the other. It was Willie Vine, the stableman at the Chesterton, gesturing for Ian to share in his hot breakfast beverage. Ian hoped it was coffee rather than tea.

\* \* \*

"So you think you made a mistake, eh, Ian?" Willie Vine sat on one of three empty wooden horseshoe kegs in the small tack room wherein the two men hid from the cold winds of late winter in south England. A small coal-burning stove resided in one corner of the room, giving out just enough heat to keep the men warm. Willie attempted to mend a broken rein while Ian applied saddle soap to the tack he had recently stripped from Tomalin's back.

"Oh, aye. I think I should have turned Sir Michael down and remained in the queue to become a mounted constable."

"But your talents are needed as an investigator of crimes, not as a horseman, though you're as good o' one as I've seen around these parts," the diminutive ex-jockey replied as he reached out for his mug of coffee, which rested on the third keg.

"Bah!" The word exploded from the tall inspector. "I've yet to need any investigative talents at Reigate Station." The policeman chuckled suddenly. "If indeed I have any deductive powers at all. I'm beginning to think my solving of those two murders was blind luck and naught else."

Before Willie could reply,

someone knocked loudly at the door. "Oye!" shouted the startled stableman. "Who might that be?" He set down the half-mended bridle and went to the door. As he opened it, a burst of cold air rushed about the tack room, chasing away the hard-won warmth from the small stove. A bundled-up figure dashed inside and helped him close the door against the elements. With a flair, the unrecognizable newcomer doffed his hat and unwrapped the scarf from his lower face as if he were a conjurer revealing the results of his latest trick.

"Sir Michael!" exclaimed Ian as he stood. It was indeed the senior inspector from Scotland Yard whom Ian had begun to blame for his soporific professional life.

"Hallo, Ian. And how are you, Mr. Vine?" Berglin inquired of the stableman.

"Fine, sir. And what brings you out this lovely mornin'?"

"Ah, I knew only an old horse artilleryman like Ian would turn out for a ride on a day as frigid as this. Besides, I called around to your flat, Ian, and your son told me you'd come out."

"Yes, sir. I was planning on spending a couple of hours riding and trading some gossip with Willie early on before I went to late church services."

"Well, you'll have to pass on the church services, unless, of course, you are able to solve the crimes by then."

"What crimes, sir?"

"Why, murder, of course. Two of them, in fact. Now, I beg your pardon, Mr. Vine, but I must steal your guest away for the day. But I see he hasn't finished cleaning his saddle . . ."

"Oh, don't worry yourself about that, gov'nor. You just take along our tall friend here and get him to work. He's been fairly neglected since you promoted him."

"Thank you, Mr. Vine. Now grab your coat, Ian, and we'll be off. Leave your car so we can travel to the Yard together in mine."

**B**erglin would give out no information until they had driven nearly to Scotland Yard. When the distinctive structure came into sight, the senior inspector asked, "What do you know about these taxicab robberies over the last several weeks?"

"Several weeks? I only know about the one in Reigate. I would assume a cab driver is robbed every week or so in a city the size of London."

"Yes, it might happen at that rate. But Scotland Yard has kept mum about the fifteen rob-



berries over the last month alone." Berglin muttered a curse under his breath. "That mistaken policy of keeping quiet has brought about two dead cabbies in just the last two nights. If we had circulated warnings concerning the earlier robberies, the perpetrators might have been put off."

Berglin drove through the side gateway into the Yard proper. It being a Sunday morning, most of the parking spaces for important police administrators were empty. As the men left the vehicle, Ian protested, "I wish you'd let me go home and change." He wore moleskin trousers along with sundry articles of battle dress from his years as an artilleryman in His Majesty's Service. Topping it all was a hat whose brim was far too wide to be currently fashionable but just the right width for an outdoorsman to keep the sun and other elements off his face and neck.

"Nonsense. We must be after these criminals. Informality is the key on Sundays at the Yard." Ian noticed that Sir Michael was dressed, as he almost always was, in a well-tailored suit and overcoat. The snapbrim of his expensive hat was narrow, and only the scarf wound about his neck had a common touch.

After a minute of negotiating the labyrinthine hallways of the building, the two men arrived at Berglin's office. As Ian had been "thanked" for his help in the two Chesterton Club murders, so had Berglin, who was actually in charge of the case. Because he could not be promoted or awarded a raise in salary, Berglin was instead given a larger office. So far as Ian could discern, no one had brought up an objection to Sir Michael's reward.

"Tea?" Berglin asked as he shed his coat, hat, and gloves and tossed them onto a leather upholstered chair. "Oh, I forgot. You're a coffee man. I'll call down to the commissiionnaire and see if he can't bring us up a fresh pot."

While Berglin made his call, Ian doffed his old army jacket and hat and hung them on a coat rack near the door. Then he shifted to an easel on which a cardboard-backed map of London rested. Several colored pins indicated locations about the city and its suburbs. Most of the pins were black. Two were red. Ian could hear Berglin ring off from his call downstairs and approach him from behind. "I conjecture that these are the taxicab robberies you mentioned. One of the black pins is in Reigate. And," Ian murmured, "these two red pins

must be the fatal assaults."

"You're correct on both conjectures. I have each case file on my desk. I would be eternally grateful if you would help me in this, Ian. I am completely stumped."

Ian glanced at his superior and noted the open, expectant look on his face. "I am always at your service, sir."

"Good! What do you propose?"

"What physical evidence do we have?" Ian asked.

"Little more than the victims' statements from the first dozen or so robberies. After that, the various junior inspectors assigned to the individual cases finally realized that only a small group of people could be involved. After that realization, they began to gather fingerprints, shoe impressions, and any rubbish at the sites of the robberies. The modus operandi has been nearly the same each time. Two women, one apparently quite elderly, were taken on as fares. The women gave the cabbie an address, and the assault was committed before they reached the destination. Of course, the two fatal robberies have been handled with much more care and given top priority. Those cabs were seized and sealed and are now down in the laboratory's garage."

"No one has inspected them?"

"Other than to recover the bodies of the victims, no. I have looked through the windows, but no one has even tried to take fingerprints from the inside of the vehicles. I was given command of this series of crimes after murder was thrown into the equation. But other than the modus operandi, which obviously changed when those cabbies were killed for their brass, nothing else looks even remotely similar from case to case. Study the map. There is no pattern."

Ian had noticed that the pins were scattered over all parts of London and its suburbs. But that meant little. Cabbies drove to all sections of the city, so there was no reason to expect that an assault and robbery could not be done on Fleet Street as easily as it could be done in the scurvy parts of Lime Street. "I expect we ought to stay at it for most of the day, sir. Otherwise, the cabbies of London will reason this out for themselves and stay off the streets."

"That would be a pity," Berglin replied, "especially for members of Parliament and the peers attending their clubs all day. They might have to take the bus." The words dripped with sarcasm. Ian had noted

when he first met Berglin that the man had no use for those who only lived off their wealth and would not work for a salary or for the benefit of those not so well endowed.

"Aye, sir, it would. I'll need three things for the present."

"You have only to name them."

"First, coffee, which you've already ordered. Second, a telephone to ring up home and explain that I won't be back for quite some time." With a flourish, Berglin swept his arm in the direction of his desk, whereon sat a telephone. "And third, time to go over the files on your desk and to inspect the taxicabs in the garage."

"It shall be done. You are welcome to use my office for as long as you like. I might pop in and out over the next few hours, if you don't mind, but my facilities are at your disposal."

Ian, already engrossed in the map and its pins, just nodded his head. Berglin smiled. He was glad to see the newly promoted inspector back at what he did best—"thinking things through," as Ian phrased it.

**B**erglin's office windows faced west, and the sun, which set toward the southwest at that time of the year, fully illuminated the room. Unlike Ian

McEwen, Berglin was not married and often arrived early and stayed late in his new office. A closet opened to reveal a wireless and a gramophone that Berglin played after normal work hours or on Sundays. The latter machine softly serenaded the two men with a Mozart concerto while Ian, shirt-sleeves rolled up above his elbows, scribbled furiously on a pad of paper as he outlined his conclusions. Berglin, in contrast, had pulled the leather chair to the window and lazed dreamily in the sunlight. A delicate china cup of long-cooled coffee sat upon the windowsill. A loud sigh from the junior inspector, followed by the audible plop of pencil being tossed onto paper, signaled to Sir Michael that Ian had completed his written summation of the evidence he'd gleaned from the nineteen case files laid open on the desk.

"So, Ian, do you have any opinions yet?" the senior inspector inquired without opening his eyes.

"I have an idea or two that appear to hold up under scrutiny." Ian drained his latest of several cups of coffee, stood, and stretched. He had been hard at it for nearly four hours. Picking up his pad, he approached a blackboard attached to the wall.

"If I may, sir?"

Berglin opened his eyes and shifted his chair to face the board. "Proceed."

Ian, with an eye cocked toward the map of London, copied its approximate shape onto the board in yellow chalk. Then he drew three small ovals, all within the boundaries of the city, in white chalk. These he labeled "CCS," "HS," and "KS." He stood motionless for a moment, then turned toward the senior inspector.

"Your map, sir, has pins in it that indicate where the robberies took place," Berglin nodded. "These three ovals," Ian continued, "represent the areas where the women were *taken on* as fares. Except for one or two cases, all the cabbies took on the women as passengers within very short distances of these three train stations. They are Charing Cross, Hampstead, and Kensington Stations."

"Good Lord! Then there is a pattern!" Berglin exclaimed.

"Aye, sir, though as to the exact reason why, I don't yet know. The perpetrators might have decided to engage a cab from a train station because, obviously, there are many about. And to do that in so open an environment as a station would not alert the cabbies that they might be in danger. Then, too, the fare has always been a

middle-aged woman accompanying an elderly woman. Several of the reports indicate that the elderly woman needed assistance in ascending steps and getting into the cabs. Even a hardbitten cabbie could not help but assist a feeble old lady."

"Ian, are you thinking what I'm thinking?" Berglin queried with eyes widening.

"Aye, sir. What we might have here are not women but two men, one rather small, who masquerade as women. Because it is winter, sir, they could have been so bundled up, as you were this morning when you came to fetch me from the stable, that their masculine features were unrecognizable. And most men can speak in a rather broken falsetto, much as an elderly woman's voice might sound. My guess is that they engage a cab at one of the stations and ask the driver to take them to some prearranged spot where their car might be already parked or another accomplice awaits. Then they assault the driver and part him from his brass. Nearly all the robberies were in the late afternoon or early evening hours when many cabbies have put in a full day. With few exceptions, the take was worth the risk . . . at least to the criminally-minded."

"You have developed an interesting hypothesis, Ian. But do we have any evidence to support it?"

"That, sir," Ian replied, rolling down his sleeves and donning his battledress jacket, "is what we are now about to discover. If you concur, I'd like to look at the two impounded taxicabs."

"Lead on."

One forensics technician was on duty that Sunday. His job was mainly to process and catalogue evidence of crimes investigated on that Sabbath. It was wearisome duty, and the chance to break the seals on the cabs gave him an intermission from the monotony. The two burgundy-colored, nearly identical cabs were parked side by side in the chilly garage. The windows were closed, and the left front door openings were sealed over with white butcher paper and tape. Those doors were routinely removed on this model of cab for easier ingress and egress of drivers. Only in the most inclement weather did cabbies replace the doors, and some never did.

After Berglin signed a form taking responsibility for the evidence, Ian approached the closer of the cabs. Taking out his folding knife, the tall inspector pierced the top of the butcher paper and slit it open

as if he were skinning some beast. He peeled away the paper while leaving a margin of it adhering with tape to the exterior metal of the car body. The metal beneath the edges of the paper might hide fingerprints or some other clues. He would leave that part of the investigation to the technicians who would return on the morrow.

Ian squatted on his heels and looked into the compartment. The front of the cab had only the driver's console and seat. From several feet away, he could see and smell the stain on the seat caused by the cabbie's releasing his body wastes upon death. The empty room in the front was for luggage. The rear of the compartment was taken up by a huge seat on which three men of Ian's size might comfortably sit. A jump seat just behind the driver could be lowered for an additional passenger. Ian asked that a portable incandescent lamp and a magnifying glass be brought to him. When the technician had done so, Ian knelt and extended his six foot three inch body as far into the compartment as he could without touching anything. He studied the bare floorboards with lamp and glass for several minutes, and much like a soldier inching forward while clearing a minefield

with his bayonet, he was able to put his hands down on clean areas on the cab's floor. With these handholds, he leaned farther inside. After only a moment, he backed out of the cab and moved to the other automobile. After cutting away the butcher paper, he made a similar inspection with the lamp in one hand and the magnifying glass in the other. Sitting back on his haunches, he requested several white envelopes and forceps. With the latter, he plucked several items off the floor of both vehicles and deposited them in the envelopes.

Ian stood and smiled at Berglin. "Right. I think we can go back to your office and see what we have. The technicians can give these cabs a real workup tomorrow, but I think I have what I need for now."

Ian placed each item he had taken from the cabs on a long credenza in the senior inspector's office. "After searching the interiors of both vehicles, I could see only one similarity between them that pertained to what the murderers might have left behind. Both held one spent wooden match located just behind the driver's seat, and both had two cigarette stubs that had been ground out on the right side of the floorboards directly next to the

seats. Their positions on the floor were nearly the same, and if you look at the stubs, you'll see that they are all of the same approximate length and have lipstick on the ends." Ian twitched his mustache. "The color appears to be identical on all four stubs."

"Lipstick?"

"To complete the man's disguise, no doubt. Sir, take a close look at the stubs. Do you see other similarities?"

Berglin bent over and studied the mashed mixtures of yellowed paper and tobacco. "Each has a crescent moon and star marking on the paper."

"If surrounded by a red field, that would produce a replica of the Turkish flag, would it not?" Having fought the Turks in Palestine during the Great War, Berglin was well aware of that symbol. "The tobacco is rough-cut and quite pungent. I suspect they are imported from Turkey. You will have to forward these on to your experts in the lab, but I'd think only a few shops in London would sell these." Ian looked at the remnants of the two spent matches. "One match, two cigarettes," he said. "Obviously the perpetrator lit the first cigarette from the match, then tossed it toward the driver's seat. Then he ignited the second cigarette from the first. It would indicate

a heavy smoker . . . ”

“Or a nervous one,” Berglin interjected.

Ian walked to the window to catch the final rays of the sun. In seconds, the orb would sink behind adjacent buildings. “All this is interesting and might help us identify a culprit from among several suspects. But for now, we have no suspects and only one option as to how we might intercept these men before they can again injure or kill.”

“Put those three stations under surveillance?”

“Aye. It will, of course, require a great deal of effort and manpower, but unless we have a break in this case, I do not see any other recourse.” Ian’s shoulders sank. He was fatigued and had drunk only coffee for sustenance all day.

“Go home, Ian. You have done well. Here are my car keys.”

“But sir, how can . . . ”

“Enough! I’ll have a constable ferry me back to the Chesterton Club, and I’ll use your car for tonight. We shall exchange them tomorrow morning.”

“Will you be coming down to Reigate, then?” Ian asked.

“Not at all. I need you here with me tomorrow and no earlier than noon. I’ll see to it that your duty post is changed from

Reigate to Scotland Yard, where you will do the most good.”

There was a pecking order among the upper echelon of police administration by seniority and titles. Berglin ranked well above the mean. So it was that Ian found his superior’s labeled, empty parking space scarcely a third of the way down the long line of automobiles. He could see his own dilapidated vehicle situated at the farthest reaches of the car park. It was a reasonably short bus ride from his flat to the Yard, so Ian could thenceforth leave his car at home for Ezme to use, but whether Berglin could actually have him transferred to the Yard remained to be seen.

Berglin’s clerk showed Ian in as soon as he identified himself to her. “Ah, Ian!” exclaimed Sir Michael, “a restful night, I hope? We may not have many in the next week. The powers that be have decided to release information on the cab robberies to the press. Now, for better or worse, all the cabbies and the public will know. It puts rather a crimp in my plan to keep watch at the train stations.”

“Was there any new assault last night?” Ian queried.



"No, it was quiet. But they have taken up to several days off between attacks. I have not, however, been idle this morning. After I pled your case with Chief Inspector Hunt, he signed the order to have you immediately transferred. I must say I built you up no end, so you mustn't disappoint us."

"I'll try not to, sir."

"As far as your suggestion went about the rarity of those odious Turkish cigarettes, you were correct. Our boys in the lab know of only a half-dozen shops that carry that particular brand. I've sent men to each in hopes of getting a lead. Now, what tack do you propose to take today?"

"Are the bodies still at the morgue?"

"No. They've been released to their families. Both left widows, and one had two children. Damn these murderous blackguards, anyhow!" Berglin spit out a few more epithets, then calmed down. "We do have the photographic evidence from the bodies. Will that do?"

"It will have to, sir."

Berglin led him down to the laboratory, where they signed a receipt for the photographs. These they took to a cramped, windowless office in the nether reaches of the building's interior. The single pockmarked desk, two chairs, and two hooks

on the wall nearly filled the tiny room. To Ian's way of thinking, the room must have once been a closet. The walls were painted an institutional green color, and the place smelled dank. To light it, a single incandescent bulb hung from a cord in the ceiling. "This, I'm afraid, is the best Chief Inspector Hunt could do for us on such short notice. You can, of course, work up in my office if you'd prefer."

"This will do fine, sir," Ian mouthed with little conviction.

"When we have another opening, you'll be moved up. Now I must be off to an administrative meeting and then on to another case I'm trying to conclude." With a wave, Berglin disappeared through the doorway, which was bereft of a door. Perhaps circulating the corridor air was the only way to heat the room, Ian thought. There was no radiator. Perhaps the chief inspector was trying to persuade Ian to transfer back to Reigate.

He sat down behind the desk and promptly cracked his knee-cap on the low slung center drawer. Holding a curse, Ian looked at the rear legs of the desk and shook his head. One of the supports was missing and had been replaced by a brick. At Reigate, Ian thought, there was at least a window to

look out. When the pain in his knee subsided, he opened the envelope and began to peruse the score of large glossy photos of the two dead men.

Ian handed his report to Berglin's clerk by four in the afternoon. A competent, matronly widow who supported three children, Mrs. Applebee would type the report in triplicate and give two copies to the senior inspector when he returned. Ian would receive the third copy. When he asked Mrs. Applebee if Berglin's return was soon forthcoming, she only shrugged her shoulders. "Sir Michael isn't one to put on airs, you know, but some of his superiors are a bit presumptuous, if you ask me," she added in low tones, looking at him from over the tops of her spectacles. "They may keep him 'busy' until late in the evening, and then they ask him to dine with them. How can the poor man turn his superiors down? It serves their social purposes to be seen in their clubs with a peer."

"Ah, I see," Ian replied, though he really did not understand the politics in the upper levels of the Yard. "Could you please tell Sir Michael that I plan to be back to work at eight tomorrow morning?"

He made his way down to the duty desk, a formidable mono-

lithic structure of dark oak behind which a constable sergeant logged in complaints as well as arrests and routed messages and queries with the help of a telephone switchboard operator and another constable. The sergeant that day was the amiable Jeremiah Riverside, who had been at Selby Street Station with Ian until he was transferred to the Yard as his retirement drew near. Such duty was much easier on Riverside's arthritis than working the streets. When Ian approached, the heavysset sergeant broke into a broad smile.

"Do you remember me, Sergeant Riverside?"

"I most certainly do. It's Inspector McEwen now, isn't it?"

"Yes. I'd like to ask you a question or two, and you may think them a bit strange."

"After thirty-odd years of plyin' this trade, I expect I've heard ev'rythin', McEwen. Ask away."

"Have you ever heard of a man who disguises himself as a woman in order to commit armed robbery?"

"That's a new one," the sergeant responded with a chuckle. "Do you mean as his usual way of doin' things, or just one instance?"

"His normal pattern." Ian took a chance and outlined his theory of the cab robberies, but

the sergeant could not recall a similar case.

"Well, sergeant, let me know if you do remember anything." Ian left the Yard and drove home, thinking there was so much more to do but he did not have the authority to speed up the slow wheels of the Yard's administration. He would have to wait his turn to contribute.

He had just risen, before dawn, to make his way to the Chesterton Club for an early morning ride on Tomalin when Berglin rang him up. "Meet me at St. Anthony's Hospital in an hour. Another cabbie was assaulted and robbed last night. He was struck down the same as those other poor fellows, but this chap must have a head of iron and glycol for blood. He was unconscious for several hours in last night's subfreezing cold. But he's recovering well and is able to speak to the police." Ian dressed and left a note for Ezme explaining that he would be taking the car after all.

**A**ccompanied by a uniformed constable, Ian and Berglin were shown into the cabbie's room by a nurse. The man, about fifty with rough features and a full mustache, was sitting up in bed. He held a mug

of steaming tea in his hands. The color of his hair could not be discerned because of the turbanlike bandages encompassing his head.

Berglin introduced himself and Ian and asked the cabbie to tell them what had happened. "Well, sir, I knows about these robberies of me fellow cabmen. So's I avoids any fares with two women. But this one little ol' lady, she hobbles down the steps at Hampstead Station after the last train. That be about ten o'clock. She beckons for a cab, and I helps her in, seein' as she can't step too lively. She gives me an address near Hendon, and away we goes. Whee, she spoke in a nasty voice like she had a cold. We gets halfway to Hendon, and she tells me to stop . . . that she got her coat caught in the door and is afraid to get it free while we're movin'. When I pulls over and turns to look, I see a man runnin' up to the cab from my side yellin', 'No, no.' Afore I could blinkin' move, I gets smacked on the side of me head. Stars all over. Next thing I knows, this constable's helpin' me out of me cab. When I asks what time it be, he says three in the blinkin' mornin'. I been out almost five hours in that cold. The doctors, they said it was a blinkin' miracle I'm still here."

Berglin nodded. "You say there was only the one woman?"

"Aye, inspector. Short, maybe two or three inches over five feet. It was hard to tell much else about her 'cept her height because of the heavy coat and that blinkin' big veiled hat she wore. I couldna recognize her again."

Ian spoke. "Was there anything you noticed about her that was odd in any way?"

The cabbie shut his eyes and, with pained expression, thought. "Well, inspector, she lights up a cigarette soon as she gets in. That's fine by me, seein' as I smokes a bit meself. But the stink of that cigarette was somethin' ter'ble!" The cabbie screwed up his face in thought once again. "I watched her in the rear view mirror after that stink come up front. She didn't hold that fag like a woman, but cupped it in her hand like a man would. I figures she gots the rheumatiz and can't hold it no other way."

"And the man who ran up to your cab?" inquired Berglin.

"Couldna tell anythin' about him, either. It happened too fast, you see. And the hat he wore was pulled down low o'er his face. He did have a light-colored coat on, I seen that much. But I can't tell you more. Sorry, inspector."

Berglin and Ian exchanged glances, then thanked the man and left. While the constable went to get Berglin's car, the two inspectors conferred in the front lobby. "Your views, Ian?"

"Obviously their modus operandi has changed because they read about themselves in the newspapers or heard it on the BBC. Now, it would seem, the short fellow engages the taxi and directs the driver to a rendezvous with his partner. Has the press been notified of this latest event?"

"Unfortunately, yes," replied Berglin. Pursing his lips in thought, he continued, "Otherwise we might report this assault as a fatal one, and these blackguards might attempt to use the same method. With the manpower I'm assembling, we'd have had all the stations under surveillance by twilight tonight. Now the culprits might lie low for awhile, or they might attempt another robbery disguised as Welsh corries for all we know."

"If I may, sir," Ian began after fishing out his pocket watch to check the time, "I'd like to interview the constable who found this latest victim."

"I received his oral report earlier this morning, Ian, when I arrived on the scene. It appeared to me to be straightforward enough," Berglin replied

with a bit of irritation in his voice. He sighed, "In any event, we have until this evening to follow up any other clues, so if you believe the constable might yield more information, go to it. Just keep me informed."

Ian placed a quick telephone call to the constable's station at Wembly Street. He had already gone off duty. The desk sergeant gave him the constable's address because he did not have a telephone. With that information, Ian stood outside the constable's flat in a quarter hour. His knock was answered immediately. Young Constable Taylor had not yet gone to bed.

"Come in, sir," insisted Taylor. "I was just readin' the mornin' papers on the case. Nothin' on last night's deeds, though. I expect the papers'll have the details by the afternoon edition."

Ian sat down with the bachelor at his tiny dining table and shared a pot of tea Taylor had already made. The two room flat was spartan but clean. "I wanted to ask you a question or two about this affair. Where exactly did you find the victim?"

"Which one, sir?"

Ian's mouth stayed halfway open in confusion. Catching himself, he asked, "What do you mean, 'which one'?"

"There were two, sir. The cab driver and a man in the bushes about thirty feet from the cab. He was comin' to and groanin' when I found him. You could see the drag marks where he'd been shifted away from the side of the cab and hidden in the bushes."

"Did you tell Inspector Berglin about the second man?"

"No, sir. He fired off so many questions at me that I had no opportunity to tell him. I wrote it up proper in my report, though, and submitted it as per regulations, sir."

"Tell me about the other man."

Taylor gave Ian a physical description which included a hat and tan overcoat. "He was knocked about the head, same as the other gent. He was a bit groggy, too, but he didn't want no help from me. Said he was a passerby who tried to help the cabbie, but the assailant struck him before he could do anythin'. Claimed he didn't know much about it. I was all for gettin' him to hospital, but he'd have none of it. Just wanted a cab, he said. Acted like he was embarrassed to be there. I got his name and address off an identification card I found on him when he first was comin' back to consciousness. It was Harold Devers, 167 Paremb Lane, Number 4, sir. I remem-

ber the address because I told the cab driver three times to make sure he got him home."

Ian wrote down that information in his notebook, drained the rest of his tea, and stood. "Taylor, I believe you may have given me the break we need. If so, I shall make sure your supervisor hears of this inestimable help." With that, Ian left Taylor in a confused, if pleased, state of mind.

When he returned to Scotland Yard, Ian discovered a long black wire originating from a newly drilled hole in the corridor wall. The wire led to his claustrophobic office and a telephone on his desk. A typed note was attached with string. "Ian. At least you'll be able to keep in touch. I'll be with Chief Inspector Hunt until late this afternoon. Follow up on your leads, and take the initiative!" It was signed, "Berglin."

So it would be more administrative politics keeping Berglin occupied when Ian needed his help. Today, he would be on his own. He slumped down behind the desk, his foot playing with the brick that supported it. His eyes darted about the room as he thought, then, with a twitch of his mustache, he drew a piece of paper and a pencil from the desk drawer. He scribbled down an outline of things to do,

studied it for a minute, and picked up the telephone receiver. He asked the operator to connect him with the duty desk and was pleased to find Sergeant Riverside at the other end of the line. From him, Ian was able to procure four constables and transportation to Paremb Lane. Riverside also gave Ian the number of the Yard's legal clerk, who could draft search warrants for both Devers and his flat.

When he had completed his calls, Ian walked quickly to the records division, where he requested the file for Harold Devers. There were two men with files under the name of "Devers, Harold," but Ian promptly ruled out one—he was incarcerated in a prison up north. The second Devers, according to the file, was just over forty years of age, had several aliases, and had been in Reigate Prison twice for petty larceny since the Great War. Ian smiled when he saw that the man's last known address was 167 Paremb Lane.

By half past ten, Ian had picked up the warrants and left a message for Berglin with Mrs. Applebee. He went on to the motor pool entrance where he was met by the four constables, one a sergeant, promised by Riverside. Ian signed for the Black Maria, an unmarked pa-

trol wagon, and they were off. He had, as a uniformed policeman, been taken along on several such missions and was routinely left in the dark as to why. He swore that if he would ever garner any rank, he would never keep any subordinates of his ignorant of such a mission. Now he put that oath into action and briefed the constables as they drove.

They circled the block once to identify any possible escape route. All the adjoining buildings had back entrances that led to a common alley. Escape was possible from either end of the alley. After parking down the block from 167, a three story brownstone, Ian told two of the constables to station themselves to cover Devers' escape from either end of the alley. He, the sergeant, and the other bobby would knock on the door and ask to see Devers. The warrants would be served only if the suspect did not voluntarily cooperate. All except Ian took truncheons from the Black Maria. Men had murdered for gain in this case, and Devers might take desperate action when confronted by this small squad of police.

A thin, consumptive woman answered Ian's knock at the door of the second story flat. He noted that her expression changed to one of fear when she

saw the uniforms and Ian's proffered identification card. "Ma'am," he began, "we are looking for Mr. Harold Devers. Might he be at home?"

"Wot for you want 'im?"

"Questioning about some robberies, ma'am." With those words, Ian heard a rustle of clothing, then the rapid footsteps of someone running across the floor. "May we come in?" he asked, taking a step inside.

"Oye, oo says?" the woman complained. Ian pushed in against her attempts to close the door on his foot. He stuffed the warrant to search for Devers on the premises into the woman's hand and strode down the hall. The slamming of a window sash as Devers opened it signaled that he was trying to go down the fire escape or a rain gutter. Ian told the sergeant and his man to double back outside and join their comrades in the alley, who were probably already in pursuit.

The woman threw down the warrant and hurled curses at Ian in particular and the police in general.

"You the wife of Harold Devers?"

"You moit say that," she said defiantly.

"Common law wife, perhaps?"



"You moit say that," she repeated.

"In any event," Ian said, drawing himself up as tall as he could, "you appear to be harboring a fugitive, and you may find yourself in a spot of trouble."

"Oye? Wot's 'e done?"

"Murder, ma'am. At the very least an accomplice to it." The first word crushed any remnant of defiance in the woman. "Your name, ma'am?"

After a moment, she answered, "Sally Entwistle. 'E's lived 'ere with me since 'e last got out of Reigate. Just us, no'ne else."

"Does he have a friend . . . short, very strong?"

"Oye. Name's Barney. Don't know 'is last name. Quiet. Mean when 'e's 'ad mor'n a dram or two. 'E was 'ere afternoon last, 'e was. Left with 'Arold. 'Arold usually takes a suitcase with 'im, but not yesterday. When 'Arold gets 'ome t'is mornin', 'e were all knocked about the 'ead. Wouldna tell me naught about it."

A commotion at the bottom of the stairs interrupted the interview. In seconds Devers, held firmly by all four constables, was brought into the room. Ian nodded toward a chair across the room from where Sally Entwistle slouched in hers. Devers was roughly sat

down in it. He sullenly eyed the tall inspector as Ian approached. A large plaster had been applied to the man's right temple, the surface of which was raised from the blow he had probably received at the hands of his friend Barney. Ian matched the man's stare, cleared his throat, then spoke in a loud, authoritative voice. "Unless you help us find Barney, we'll assume that you were the one who killed those two cabbies. Murder for financial gain is punishable by death, Devers."

Sally Entwistle cowered in her chair and looked at Devers with wide eyes. He glared back at her, knowing the name of his partner had come from her. But there was also fear in his eyes that Ian could not miss. "Did you ever see the gallows at work while you were at Reigate, Devers?"

"'Twasn't me!" he shouted and struggled against the strong grip of the constables who surrounded him.

"Who, then?" Ian insisted.

"'Twasn't me, I tell ya!"

"Was it Barney? If you tell us what happened, perhaps it'll only be another stretch at Reigate for you. Otherwise . . ." Ian left the end of the comment incomplete.

"All right! 'Twas Barney! I ne'er killed no one! I didn't

know anyone was dead till after I read it in the newspapers. I thought Barney'd only knocked them cabbies out. I tried to stop him last night, but I was too late."

"We'll see about all that later. What's his last name?"

"He said it was Day. You'd think it'd be O'Day from the Irish brogue he has."

"You don't think that is his real name?" Ian asked.

"Some people in this business . . . well, they keep everything to themselves." The man was regaining some of his composure. Ian wanted to keep him off balance during this initial questioning.

"Where can we find him?"

"Like I says, he kept that to himself." When Ian leveled a cynical look at Devers, the man's bravado vanished. "You've got to believe me! It was just a business arrangement. He'd come and pick me up. We did a job, and he dropped me back home. I may have helped in that first lot of robberies, but I don't kill. I don't!"

Ian asked Devers for, and received, a detailed physical description of Day, which included a green-inked tattoo on the back of his left hand. It was of a horse's head with crossed riding crops below it. He filed that bit of information away for

future reference. He then served the second warrant to search the flat for incriminating evidence which included, but was not restricted to, women's clothing into which Devers might be able to fit. The sergeant soon found a valise that contained women's outer garments and a makeup case. Ian pulled out a winter coat and held it up to the subdued Sally Entwistle. It would have covered her like a tarpaulin. Ian relaxed enough to smile. He had half the cab-robbing duo in custody. But the more dangerous of the two was still at large.

Back at the Yard, Devers was charged only with armed robbery and incarcerated. Ian made sure the physician who called around late each day at the lockup would see to Devers' head injury. Then the tall inspector made it a point to thank the four constables who had apprehended Devers. When he returned to his subterranean office, he found that a lamp with a green glass shade and an official Scotland Yard appointment calendar had been placed on his desk. Ian chuckled. It looked as if this tiny cavity of a room was to be his permanent residence while at the Yard.

A quick call to Berglin's office yielded the news that Chief Inspector Hunt still required

Sir Michael's "services," according to Mrs. Applebée. Ian left another message that he had arrested one of the two culprits and would appreciate Berglin's help in tracking down the second. After ringing off, he pulled a folding knife from a trouser pocket and sharpened his pencil over the dustbin. He began to write a draft of the latest of his reports on the case and had gotten down only a few lines when he realized he was wasting time. The report could wait. If Barney Day got word of Devers' arrest, the man might flee. And if he were indeed Irish, he could well escape into the Republic of Ireland, where extradition would be difficult at best.

Ian tossed the pencil down in frustration and watched it dance across his desk and onto the floor. He calmed down and fixed his stare at the green wall of the corridor. The disgusting color matched that of his office. He mused through the facts he had. Day was about forty-five, small yet strong enough to drag the full-sized Devers ten yards and conceal him in the bushes. He had also killed two men, according to the lab report, with a single blow to the temple. And there was the green horsehead tattoo. The green might reflect his Irish heritage. Oh yes, Ian thought, there were the crossed

riding crops with the horsehead...

"Jockey!" shouted Ian. "How could I be so blind? He's a jockey... or an exercise rider anyway!" His next thought was of Willie Vine, the stableman at the Chesterton Club. He was an ex-jockey. In less than five minutes, Ian was in his dilapidated car driving through midday traffic toward Grave's End Heath and the Chesterton Club.

**I**t had turned out to be a mild day for February, and members of the club wished to ride. Willie had just gotten two portly ones off on a ride mounted on a pair of gentle, Thoroughbred-Shire crosses when he spotted Ian walking toward the stable. At a shout from Vine, the inspector changed direction and moved to where the stableman stood collecting unused bits of tack left at the equitation arena. "Ian, you missed your turn on Tomalin this mornin'.

"Aye. I was called in to duty before dawn, I'm afraid."

"Well, ol' Tom's out with Sir Charles Casterby right now, so he'll get some exercise. Sir Charles is a good rider, have no fear."

"Willie, I've come for some help on a case."

"From me?" the small man asked incredulously.

"Aye," Ian replied. "I've reason to believe an ex-jockey or exercise rider is involved with the murder of those two cabbies. We're looking for a man about forty-five, still slender but sturdy, and about your height. He calls himself Barney Day. Speaks with an Irish brogue."

"That description fits mor'n a handful of jocks I know."

"This one also has a tattoo on his left hand. Green horse's head with crossed riding crops beneath it." Ian watched as the thoughtful look on Vine's face changed.

"Oh, aye! I remember a jock with a tattoo like that who started his career about the time me own was windin' down. But his name wasn't Day. It was O'Reilly. Barnabas O'Reilly. I remember because it was such a strange sort of first name for a jock, but he seemed proud of it. Do you think he's goin' by the name of Day?"

"Would there be any easy way to trace him? Perhaps a register of jockeys, if such a thing exists?"

"If he's still a jock, the Royal Academy of Equine Racing has a register for active riders. It's to keep out the riffraff and those that's been struck off for abusin' horses or cheatin'. But if he's over forty years old, he's probably retired. I doubt they

have any recent information about him."

Ian muttered a mild oath under his breath. He picked up an extra saddle that had been placed on the fence and followed Willie back to the tack shed where Sir Michael had found Ian two mornings before. After setting the saddle on its stand, Ian slumped down on the horseshoe keg. He was not looking forward to consulting the Royal Academy of Equine Racing.

"Say!" Willie exclaimed. "I have me an idea."

"Go on."

"Not all of us ol' jocks go there, but most of us know of a pub down near Richmond Park called Boots and Saddles. It's owned by an ol' cavalry sergeant. Caters to the common horsey folk. Jocks, exercise riders, old horse soldiers like yourself, Ian. You'd like it."

"And you think we might find Barney Day . . . or, rather, Barnabas O'Reilly there?"

"Or someone who knows or has seen him of late."

"Willie, you're going with me. I'll speak with the Chesterton Club manager about it."

"Will he let me go?"

Ian's eyes narrowed. "This isn't a pleasure jaunt," he said. "This is business for Scotland Yard."

\* \* \*

A warm day had developed over south England, a contrast to the several previous crisp days. By noon, the warm front had heated the air so that it covered the cold, bare ground. The result was a thickening fog that built up over the morning hours. By the time the odd couple of Ian McEwen and Willie Vine, the latter more than a foot shorter than the former, walked into the pub, a mist had also begun to fall from darkening skies.

Willie tipped his damp tweed cap to a middle-aged barmaid, and she returned his greeting with a smile. Ian had begun to doff his hat when he noticed that no one else was bare-headed except the man behind the bar. With Ian in tow, Willie made a beeline to that man. Men of all shapes, ages, and sizes filled the establishment. Most were dressed in working men's garb. Various bits, spurs, stirrups, and racing silks hung from the walls as decoration. Only horsemen, Ian thought, would consider the place attractive enough to drink in. That might be a reason why no women, horse lovers or not, were in attendance.

"Sergeant Leahy!" the diminutive Willie Vine shouted above the constant din of male voices.

"Willie, me boy! How be 'e? 'E don't darken me tavern door much' no more."

"Ah, I'm gettin' too old for such wild goin's-on as Boots 'n' Saddles be. I'd like you to meet my good friend, Ian McEwen. He's a horse artilleryman from the Great War."

Leahy and McEwen shook hands across the bar. "Aye, I figured 'e not be a jockey, McEwen!" the old cavalryman exclaimed. "What might 'e two boys have?"

"Two pints o' your best sludge, sergeant," Willie said before Ian could speak.

When the proprietor shifted down the bar to pour out their drinks, Ian began to protest that coffee would be sufficient, considering he was on duty. "Be off with you," Willie replied in good spirits. "You'd look a mite suspicious nursin' a mug o' coffee in this place."

When Leahy returned with their drinks, he and Willie exchanged inconsequential gossip for a minute or two. Soon Ian heard the ex-jockey say, "I was wonderin' whate'er happened to that jock who came along at the end of me ridin' days. Barnabas O'Reilly was his name." When the proprietor's brow knit in thought, Willie added, "He had that green tattoo on his hand. Horsehead and ridin' crops."

"Oh, aye! Barney's the only name I knows him by. 'E comes in reg'lar most afternoons. Right quiet un, 'e be."

"Might he come in today?" Willie asked, exchanging a quick glance with Ian.

"Most likely 'e will. Sits over there in th' corner," the ex-sergeant of cavalry replied, pointing to a small, empty table with two chairs. "'Cept for a few jocks and exercise riders, 'e keeps to 'imself. Reads the paper, does some writin' and cipherin'. No doubt schemin' up somethin'. But 'e don't tell me what it's all about, and I don't ask 'im."

Ian and Willie wended their way among the tables to one that had a good line of sight for all entrances as well as O'Reilly's favorite table. They were at first quite tense, as if they expected the culprit to arrive at any second. But during the next couple of hours, with the help of several refills of Willie's tankard and one for Ian's, they relaxed and talked horse. Twice Ian rang up Berglin's office from the telephone kiosk outside the pub, but he was told he was still not available.

Upon Willie's third return from the lavatory, he sat down at the table and leaned toward Ian.

"Do you see that fellow with both hands on the bar right

next to the front door? That's O'Reilly."

Ian picked out a short man in a waist-length wool jacket that enhanced his well-developed upper body. Steam rose from his wet jacket and tweed cap. He was talking with Sergeant Leahy, who in turn nodded in Ian and Willie's direction. Apparently Leahy had, innocently enough, informed O'Reilly that Willie had asked about him. Willie's back was to the bar, and Ian faced it. He noted that O'Reilly looked quizzically at both of them, then glanced about the pub as if he were expecting a trap. Instead of going to his table, O'Reilly plucked a heavy-looking, metal-tipped swagger stick off the bar, turned on his heel, and left. So abrupt was O'Reilly's departure that Leahy was left talking to himself.

Ian was up after him in less than a second. He wished he had made contact with Berglin and had called in some extra help, but he had been afraid O'Reilly might be warned away by uniformed police. It was a spurious precaution. O'Reilly had dashed off like a rabbit at the first hint that anyone had inquired about him.

Gaining the outside, Ian stopped. The warm air and light rain crossing over the cold ground had yielded an espe-

cially thick fog, its tendrils being moved about by the light wind. Through those grey wisps, he could just make out the form of Barnabas O'Reilly rapidly trekking across the flat land of Richmond Park. Willie Vine and Leahy rushed out the door and bumped unceremoniously into the tall inspector.

"Sergeant Leahy," Ian commanded with his warrant card extended in hand, "please ring up Scotland Yard and tell them a suspect in the taxicab murders has entered Richmond Park on foot, and that I am in pursuit." After a moment's hesitation, Leahy disappeared back into his establishment. Ian trotted across the street and reached the grassy flats of the park. Willie was at his heels. Coming to a stop on the edge of an area where football and rugby football were often played, Ian turned to his short friend. "You must go back, Willie. This man has killed twice already. He will not be easy to subdue."

"Not likely will I go back, Ian. Him bein' dangerous is reason enough for me to stay."

"But I'm paid to take chances. Go back. I can't waste time arguing about this."

"Then don't, Ian. Get on with it. But I'll not desert a friend."

Ian clapped Willie on his shoulder and began to run in

the general direction of O'Reilly's last position. The wind was light and directly into his face. In less than a minute they had reached a line of poplar trees on the other side of the football pitch. Ian stopped and looked beyond to see a thick stand of hardwood trees just barely visible in the thick fog. O'Reilly could be behind any of them, or he might still be running a quarter mile off. Just as Willie began to ask a question, Ian brought his index finger to his lips for silence. He could smell something familiar coming to him on the wind. It was heavy, musky, and unpleasant. Within seconds, Ian's brain identified the unmistakable scent of those pungent Turkish cigarette stubs he had recovered from the taxicabs. The smell had clung to the heavy smoker's clothing; Barnabas O'Reilly was near.

Using the scent and the direction of the breeze to guide him, Ian walked softly toward an oak, its bare branches enshrouded by fog. When he was within ten feet of the tree, he stopped and yelled, "Give it up, O'Reilly! This is Scotland Yard, and you cannot escape." When the culprit did not respond, he took two more steps, then had to decide which side of the huge tree trunk to go around. Without looking back, he waved



Willie to stay behind him and took one step to the right of the tree. As he did so, Barnabas O'Reilly charged from around the other side with the heavy swagger stick upraised. Ian had time only to lift his left arm to guard his head. The metal tip of the stick crashed into his upper arm, numbing the limb from the point of impact to his fingers. The blow was powerful enough to knock him to the side, and Ian knew he was vulnerable to another strike. The second blow, however, did not land. Willie Vine had reacted quickly and stepped forward to lay hold of the other ex-jockey. The two short men tumbled to the wet ground and rolled. In pain and with only his right arm functioning, Ian stumbled toward the tangle of men. He arrived just as O'Reilly lashed out at Vine. The blow landed with a sickening thud on Willie's exposed back. Willie did not stop moving but continued to roll away from O'Reilly's bludgeon. With amazing speed, the killer sprang to his feet and, emitting a growl from deep within his throat, again charged the unarmed inspector. Ian took two steps back, then used his only advantage over the shorter man—his longer reach. Ian struck out with his leg and planted the heel of his boot just below

O'Reilly's ribs. Before succumbing to that kick, he swung his club at Ian, but it only grazed the taller man's leg.

O'Reilly fell, his breath knocked from him. Ian stepped up to O'Reilly, leaned down, and, with his good right arm, landed a fist on the man's chin. O'Reilly's struggles to breathe ceased. Ian watched the man's chest for a few moments, then noted that it again began to function. O'Reilly was alive but would remain unconscious for the moment.

Ian hurried over to where his friend knelt on the ground. "Are you all right, Willie?" His left arm felt like fire as sensation came back to it.

Willie stood with Ian's help. "Aye. I'll be sore for some time, I'll wager, but we've both had horses kick us harder'n this." Vine grimaced from the pain in his back, but he was able to take deep breaths and rotate his body at the waist. "Nothin' seems broke, anyroad."

The sound of running footsteps from the direction of the Boots and Saddles signaled the arrival of help. In seconds, the helmeted forms of constables appeared in the lazily swirling fog enveloping Richmond Park. When Ian and Willie were spotted by one of the bobbies, he drew out his whistle and blew. The distinctive sound rallied

the others from out of the fog. Ian was happy to turn over the handling of the prisoner to the men in blue wool and oilskin capes.

The following Sunday afternoon, after church services, Ian was again inside the Chester-ton Club stable, grooming out Tomalin after their long ride. His middle son, James, was similarly engaged with a rose-colored mare who had been his mount that day. Willie sat on a bale of hay with a mug of coffee in hand. The blows delivered by Barnabas O'Reilly had yielded several days' worth of stiffness and odd-looking bruises on Willie's back and Ian's arm, but there had been no long-term disability for either man.

A waft of cool air ran down the stable's corridor, indicating that someone had entered the warmer interior of the building. "Ah, Ian. I thought I'd find you here." It was the voice of Senior Inspector Sir Michael Berglin. He walked to where the other three worked or lounged.

Ian looked over to his superior, thumbed back his hat, and spoke. "I hope it's not another murder investigation that brings you out here, sir."

"No, no. Not yet, at any rate. I've come to add Chief Inspector

Hunt's recommendations to mine. He wanted to heap his accolades upon me at last night's party at the French Embassy, but I persuaded him that I had little to do with it. I'm not often forceful around the chief inspector, considering he is my boss, but he finally saw it my way. And my way is to have you rewarded."

Ian looked puzzled. "In what way, sir?"

"Well, there are no slots currently open for senior inspectors . . ." he began.

"Please, sir. My last promotion nearly brought on a rebellion in the ranks," Ian protested.

"Ah, I understand. Well, there are other means to recompense such initiative and results as yours."

"Sir?"

"Would you accept a new office, albeit shared with two other junior inspectors?"

Ian frowned as he worked at brushing out Tomalin's forelock. "Aye, on one condition, sir."

"Which is?" Berglin inquired.

"Does this office have a window?"

"I'll have one put in if it doesn't."

"Then it's settled," Ian replied with a chuckle, "and thank the chief inspector for me."

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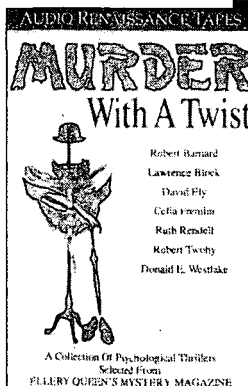
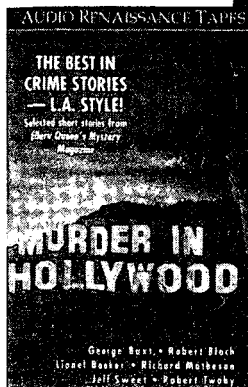
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# UNSOLVED

by  
Walter Shepherd

*Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?*

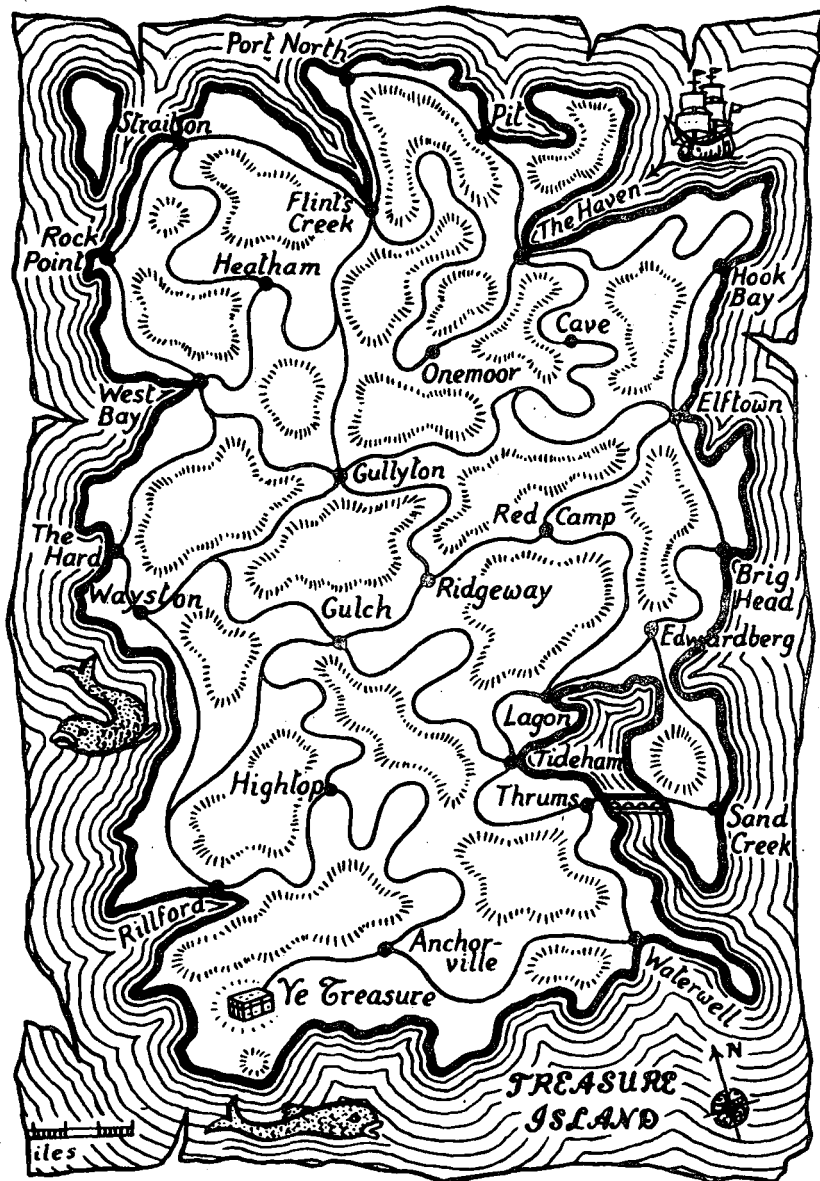
*The answer will appear in the Mid-December issue.*

Gangster Gus of Gunnersbury (which is so-called because—but never mind that now) buried his treasure in the southwest corner of the island shown in the chart opposite. He lived at The Haven, a village whose chief industries are fishing and golfball renovating and which is situated on the harbor at the northeast. Whenever Gangster Gus had treasure to stow away, he used to drive to his cache on a moonless night and return in time for breakfast. Thus his wife, who knew her Gus backwards and called him “Sug” in consequence, never, never wondered where he had been. But in order to do this, Gus was obliged to travel by the shortest route, and the problem is to decide which, of all the possible routes, this was, and to do it by inspection of the map without measuring instruments. NOTE: The answer will be given as a list of the places passed through.

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See page 149 for the solution to the November puzzle.

“Treasure Island,” from MAZES AND LABYRINTHS: A BOOK OF PUZZLES by Walter Shepherd, © 1961 by Dover Publications, Inc., original book titled FOR AMAZEMENT ONLY, published by Penguin Books, Ltd., © 1942. Used by permission of Rupert Crew Ltd. (London).



# Witch and Cousin

by Maggie Wagner-Hankins



**M**y cousin Alice claimed to be a witch. I'd never met her till my mother and I traveled south into Arkansas for my Grandmother Herrington's funeral last summer. This was

my father's mother, and Mom and I hadn't kept in touch with that side of the family since the divorce, but Mom decided I ought to attend my grandmother's funeral.

Maybe she felt it would help



make up for the fact that my father was out of the country and couldn't get back in time for the services. She came along as chauffeur, since I was only sixteen at the time and she didn't want me driving long distances by myself. (There were no airports anywhere near the small town where the Herrington clan lived.) She probably also figured it was a good way to get a few days off work without anyone's getting upset. Who could say no to a request to attend your mother-in-law's funeral?

I thought my cousin Alice would be happier to see me. All she said when we were introduced was, "So you're Celia. Well, we meet at last." She wasn't exactly rude, but she had this cold, distant attitude that made me feel even more a stranger than I was.

She steered clear of me that first day we were there, and all through the funeral the next morning, but after it was over I looked up from the rock where I was sitting, out at the edge of her yard, just thinking about things, and there she was.

"Nice of you to show up now," she said, flinging her long, almost white hair back over her shoulder. "Where were you the last two years when Granny was so sick?"

As if I could help it that I

hadn't been here! And how would I have known our grandmother was sick? I tried explaining this to her, but she just shrugged.

"It doesn't matter," she said. "You're here now. Soon you'll be gone, and then I won't be bothered with you again."

"You don't have to be 'bothered' with me now," I said, already tired of her tone of voice. "You came over here to *me*, remember?"

"So I did. Let's be friends, Celia. It'll make things easier. We need to talk."

I wondered if her abrupt manner was typical of all Arkansans or if it was only a personal trait of hers, like her tendency not to look me in the eye when she spoke.

"Okay," I said cautiously. "Fine. I'd hoped we could be friends."

She just smiled, her eyes turning suddenly sly, and said, "Let's find someplace a little more private to talk. You'll be leaving in an hour, and we hardly even know each other."

And whose fault is that? I wanted to say. I've been here since yesterday morning. Instead I got up and trailed her into the house, a dutiful guest following the orders of her strong-willed hostess.

Her room looked like something from a horror movie



—black, red, and dark, thanks to the black window shades. Instead of turning on a light, she plopped down on the red carpet by her bed, motioning for me to do the same.

"My mom would kill me if my room looked like this," I said.

"Oh, my folks are used to it. They've given up on me." It was then that she broke the big news. "Did you know I'm a witch?" she asked casually.

I laughed, figuring she would, too. She didn't.

"I am. Granny was, too. You know that, cousin? You're Granny's granddaughter the same as me, so you might even be part witch yourself."

"Oh? Is that a fact?" I asked, wondering where this was leading. I decided to go along with her game. "But why only part? Maybe I'm a full-fledged witch."

"Oh no. You're only part witch. Actually, so am I, for the time being."

"Well, Alice, I'll tell you what. You can be the full-time witch for our family. I have other things to keep myself occupied."

"That's kind of what I had in mind," she said, studying her long nails. "Did you know, Celia, that our birthdays are exactly six months apart? Yours is May third and mine is November third. That makes us

opposites on the zodiac wheel—Taurus and Scorpio. We were born the same year, too."

"Interesting."

"Isn't it?" She met my eye just briefly out of the corner of hers.

"Is all this leading somewhere?" I asked.

"As a matter of fact, it is," she said. "I need something from you."

"From me? What?"

"Your power."

That one caught me by surprise. I laughed again. "My power? You want to go into a little more detail on that?"

"We're not just cousins," she said. "We're actually—two parts of a whole. We're almost exact complements."

"Oh? In what way?" I had to admit she was good at building suspense. "Besides being—how did you put that?—'opposites on the zodiac wheel'?"

"Well, look at yourself," said Alice. "Your hair is almost black. Mine is almost white. What hand do you write with?"

"My left."

"I'm right-handed."

"Most people are."

"Then why aren't you?" she asked. I had no answer.

"What's your best subject in school? No, wait! Let me guess. English. And you were a spelling bee champ in grade school, right?"

I was amazed. "But how did you—"

"Lucky guess, cousin. My best subject is math. And I won the science fair in fifth grade. I'm terrible in English, and I can't spell to save my soul. My guess is that you've always had a little trouble with math."

She was right. Somewhere a door closed, but I barely noticed. Witch or not, Alice had me hooked. I'd heard that the best storytellers are from the South. I was beginning to believe it.

"Even our names—" she said. "Alice, Celia. Same letters, all mixed around." She waited for that to sink in, then continued, "What else? I hate vegetables. You?"

I thought about lying to her, but I knew she could find it out easily enough by asking my mother, which I didn't put past her. I admitted sheepishly, "I'm—a vegetarian."

She gave a hoot of a laugh and slapped her leg. "I knew it! So, you believe me now? Two parts of a whole?"

"It's an interesting theory," I admitted. "Except that I don't believe anyone is only part of a person. Where did you hear all this, anyway? From our grandmother?"

"Actually, yes. Granny was part of a whole with a cousin of hers. They were born six

months apart, same as us. And guess what? They died exactly six months apart, too."

There was a knock at the door. "Celia, are you in there?" It was my mother.

"We're just chatting," Alice called out. "Can we have another fifteen minutes or so?"

"Sure," said Mom, probably thrilled that we were finally speaking to each other. "Have fun."

"So, all this has been really interesting," I told Alice, "but let's get back to that other thing you were talking about. About wanting my power. What does that mean?"

"It means, dear cousin, that we're both witches—or *part* witches—because that runs in families. Now, we could *share* our powers, the way Granny and her cousin did. They always did their spells together."

"What kind of spells?" I asked cautiously. I still could hardly believe this whole thing wasn't a joke cooked up by Alice, to try to fool her "city slicker" cousin. But if it wasn't a joke, then she was obviously a little crazy, and there was no sense in making her mad.

"All kinds. Matchmaking, healing—"

"Could you make people do things against their will?" I asked. "You know, bewitch them?"

"They could have. Granny said they had when they were younger, but later they concentrated on helping people with their powers. Personally, I'd say that was a waste. Let people take care of their own problems."

"Well, what would *you* use the power for, then?" I asked.

"To get ahead in the world, like any normal person." She acted as if I'd asked the stupidest question in the world. "I may not have been born with money, but I'll have all I need, and everything else I want, too—perfect job if I feel like working, best-looking guys, great homes all over—once I have the power."

"And why would I want to give you any power?" I asked. "If I could, that is."

"Because, cousin, I have a feeling your half has already been more of a burden to you than you've cared for. Am I right?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said, feeling a little twinge in the pit of my stomach.

"Don't you?" she asked, for once looking me straight in the eye. This time I was the one to look away. "You mean you've never felt something working in you—working *through* you—that you couldn't explain?"

I thought a minute. Should I

admit to the few times I'd known ahead of time that something was going to happen, or the way the plants in my house seemed to perk up before my very eyes when I sent them loving thoughts and gently stroked their leaves? Or the way I'd look at certain strangers and know their problems, and feel so powerless to help?

"No," I said. "I've never felt anything like that."

She just looked at me for a minute, then slowly moved her face closer to mine. Her eyes were ice blue, even in the near-dark. "You're either lying," she said quietly, "or you're stupid. Let me give you some examples from *my* life, and maybe you'll 'remember' something."

I nodded.

"Okay: I have precognition sometimes. I know when something is going to happen, and it always does, just the way I see it. Sound familiar?"

"No," I lied.

"Once I made a dog jump in a pond in the middle of winter, just by using my mind power on him," she said. "And I made Miranda Payson, the smartest girl in my class, write the wrong answers on a test and get an F. It was the first one she ever got. Boy, was she shocked."

She sat back against the bed and laughed quietly.

"I wouldn't think those things would be something to be proud of, even if you *did* do them, which I doubt."

"Oh, I did them, all right. And I was *very* proud of it. It was hard work. But it was worth it because it proved I did have some of the power."

"Sounds like you have enough power as it is," I said. "Any more and you could be dangerous."

"Oh, that was just kid stuff," said Alice. "I won't be wasting my time on things like that. There are bigger fish in the sea. And don't start feeling sorry for the world. I won't mess with anyone who doesn't mess with me first."

We sat quietly for a few seconds, then she turned and said, "So what about it, cousin? Feel like handing over the reins? Don't worry, I'd make it worth your while. I never forget a favor. And aren't you about ready to stop having those nightmares?"

Nightmares? So she knew about those, too. But how? Was she having the same dreams?

"You've had them, too, haven't you?" she said. "Running through the woods just at twilight, desperately following someone, chasing a wisp of dark hair, feeling panicky without knowing why. Except in *your* dream you're probably

running down city streets, chasing a wisp of *white* hair."

I didn't want to, but I nodded.

"That's *me* you're chasing," she explained. "Your other half. And you almost find me, except when you suddenly come to a lake you realize you're too late. The white hair—*my* hair—is disappearing beneath the surface. And you know you have to come in, too, because you're the other part. Against your will, you step into the water. It's so cold. You start to sink down into—"

"Stop it!" I said sharply. "Just shut up."

"I thought so." Her voice was smug.

I took a few deep breaths. "So you think it's possible for me to—*give* you—what you're calling my 'power'?"

"Oh, I know it is. Granny told me. She knew about you and me. She knew more about you than you might think. She had her ways of keeping up with people, and you *were* special to her, even if you never heard from her. So how 'bout it? Your mom'll be back any minute."

"Fine." I jumped up, suddenly tired of the whole thing. It had to be a joke, or some delusion my nutty cousin was having. So we'd just play it out to its end, and then I could forget about it and forget about her. We'd be back in Kansas

City in ten hours, and I could get on with my life.

"Great. Step over here," she said, leading me to a massive dark wood desk. "This was Granny's desk." On it were two small bowls, one silver-colored and one gold. Beside the gold-colored bowl was a white candle in a gold candle holder, and to the left of the silver bowl was a black candle in a silver holder. In the center was a small black box.

Alice seemed a little nervous, and I could tell she was trying to hurry. She knew this wouldn't be the perfect time for my mother to pop her head into the room.

"Now let me explain what's going to happen," she said, lighting the candles. "We'll each pull three of our hairs out and place them in our bowl. Also, an eyelash and a little piece of fingernail. You have the gold bowl, I'll take the silver. Then we burn the stuff in the bowl. I take some of the ash out of each bowl and smear a circle on your forehead. When I draw my hand away, I've taken your power, and you're free."

*Free.* Free of the nightmares, I thought. And free of knowing things before they happen. I've never been crazy about that. I wonder if it will affect my plants.

"Let's do it," she said, hand-

ing me a book of matches.

I barely felt the sharp pain as I yanked my hair out. It wasn't long before we both had what we needed in the bowls. We each set a lighted match to the contents, and watched as our hair fried in an instant. The fingernail took a little longer. Finally, she was satisfied that we had enough ash.

"Okay, cousin," she said, rubbing her index finger in first her bowl, then mine. "I won't forget this. When I'm at the top of the heap, I'll send for you."

A funny feeling came over me as she touched me. "That won't be necessary," I said. When she had rubbed a circle on my forehead, she pulled her finger away. I have to say I was tingling.

"Now!" she said with a triumphant smile. "In this box is a message from Granny. She said if you ever did decide to give me your half of the power, we should open this box and read the message. I've been so tempted to peek at it, but I figured it might ruin the spell or something." She picked up the box with trembling fingers.

"Feeling all right?" I asked, the strange, glowing feeling still hanging over me.

"Not really," she said. "This whole thing has wiped me out. After you leave, I'm going to take a long nap."

"That's a good idea, cousin," I said quietly.

She opened the box and pulled out a folded piece of paper. Unfolding it, she held it close to a candle, squinting to read it. "I can't—seem to make this out. It's all—scribbly or something—"

"Let me see it," I said, feeling curiously at ease. I took the paper out of her hand. Though the figures were unfamiliar to me, I had no trouble reading them.

I smiled. "Oh dear," I said, barely concealing my grin.

"What?" She looked panicky. "Stop playing games and give me back the paper." She tried to snatch it from me but, somehow, her hand missed it.

"What for? You can't read it anyway," I said, my voice still calm. "But I can. Shall I tell you what Grandmother Herrington has to say?"

"You can't read it either."

"Guess again—*cousin*. Here goes. 'So you've tried it, have you, Alice dear? I wish I hadn't had to be less than truthful with you, but after years of watching you grow more selfish and self-centered, with never a care for anyone but yourself, I knew I couldn't possibly lead you to a greater power. I knew you'd be better off without even the part you had, so I'm glad you've gotten to this point. Celia, I've been very aware of you,

too, even though you've only seen me a time or two in your dreams. You're a good, loving, caring person, and I know that this power can be trusted to you for the right use. Don't let it be a burden. It doesn't have to be. But when you need a little help in your work as a healer of the planet, which you're already showing signs of being, don't be frightened of it, either. Now, Alice, don't even think about trying to get even with your cousin. You can't hurt her, and she won't hurt you, so why not try to part on good terms. I love you both, always, Granny Herrington.'"

Alice just stood there. In the candlelight her face looked like a grotesque mask, eyes wide, mouth agape. I felt kind of sorry for her. Now that we were, in a way, bound together more closely than I'd have guessed possible, I felt all her pain and frustration as intensely as if they'd been my own. Except I knew they were her feelings and not mine.

A knock at the door made Alice jump.

It was Mom again. "Celia, we really do need to take off, honey."

"Coming," I called out, folding the paper and tucking it into my skirt pocket. "Alice and I are just saying our goodbyes."

I took Alice's hand, a ges-

ture that made her wince but one she seemed powerless to prevent. "I'm sorry you won't have any help making it to the top. But I have the feeling that, if you really want to wind up there, you'll find another way. Still, I wish you'd think it over. They say it's lonely at the top."

She hated me. It was clear as crystal from the look in her eyes. She didn't say a word as I squeezed her hand and said, "You let me know if you need anything. Your parents have our number. I mean it. You were right. We really are two parts of a whole."

I had the sudden feeling that my grandmother was there in the room with us. I could even see her face—smiling now. It was a face I'd seen in my dreams but had never recognized.

"At least now *you* won't have the nightmares any more," I told Alice. "If you do have that dream again, you'll dream that it's me who's chased you to the lake, but when you jump in, you won't be there for long, because I'll be grabbing you by

those wisps of white hair and pulling you right back out again."

"Don't do me any favors," she said softly. Then she stalked to the door, jerked it open, and waited for me to leave. An almost blinding shaft of light entered the room from the hallway. As I walked past her, I wanted more than anything to ease her pain. But this time, when I reached out to her, she avoided my touch. I heard the door slam shut behind me.

It didn't matter. I was the one with the power now. And she could try all she wanted, but she wouldn't stop me from caring about her, or checking in on her from time to time. Like it or not, I was going to do my best to help her get her act together.

And someday, after she managed to find the decent human being she'd buried somewhere inside herself, maybe I'd even give her back some of the power. I could do that. She didn't know it, but I did, thanks to the P.S. at the end of our grandmother's letter, which I knew had been meant for my eyes only.



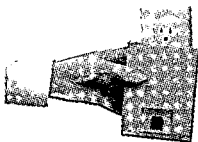
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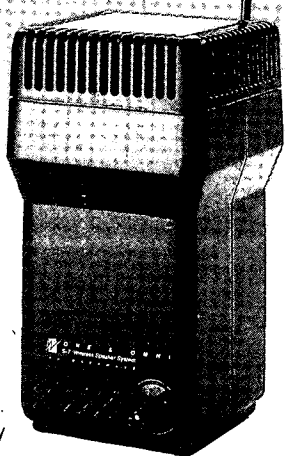
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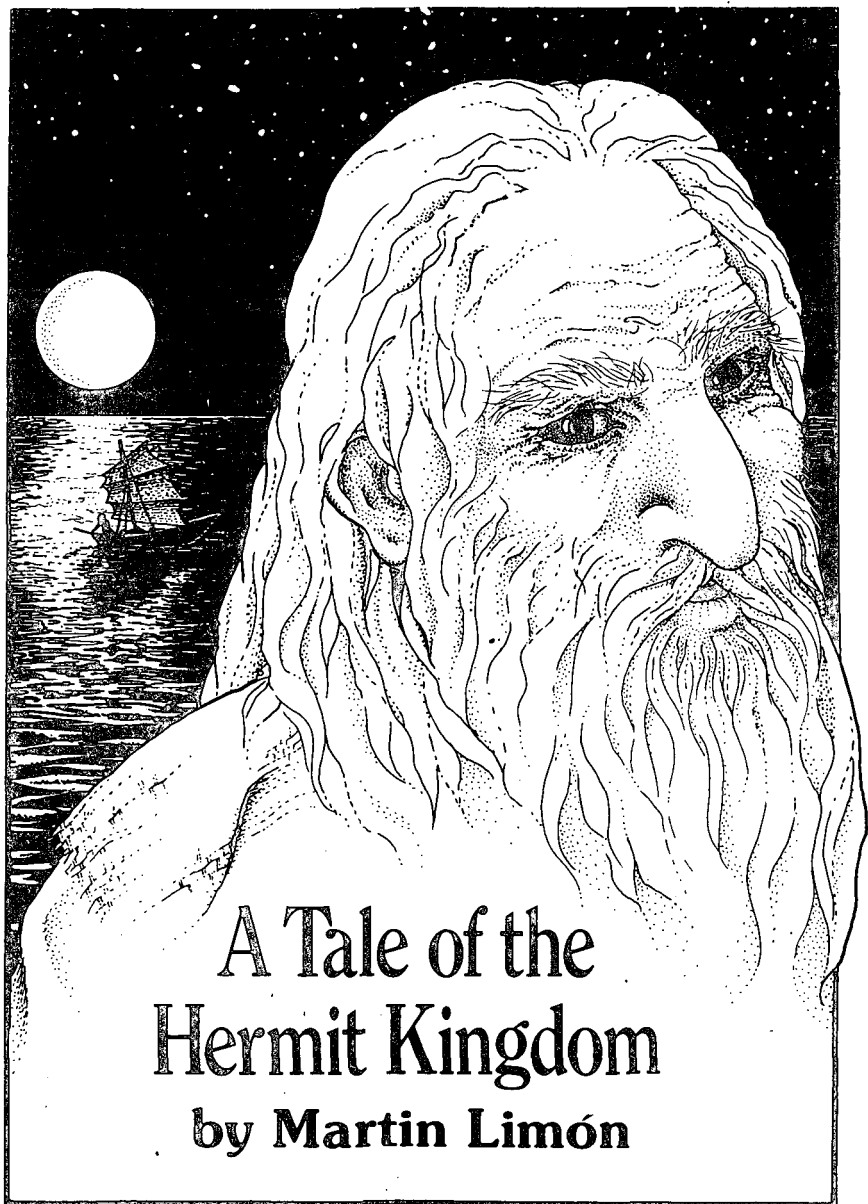
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FICTION



**A Tale of the  
Hermit Kingdom  
by Martin Limón**

*Illustration by Laurie Davis*

101  
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**A**fter leading Master Han to the lowest level of the storage cellar, Servant Pyong set his lamp atop a splintered crate and hefted tattered bales of sorghum from their resting place in the corner. A serpent's tongue of flame flickered off rough stone walls.

Master Han shivered. He hadn't been down here since he was a child, and he didn't like the place any better now than he had then. It seemed as if long-dead secrets, frightened by the sputtering oil lamp, were fleeing into the night.

When all the bales of sorghum had been moved, Servant Pyong wiped his brow and turned to Master Han.

"Now you will see, Honored Sir, what your father has been hiding all these years."

He slipped a shaft of copper into a hole in the wooden floor, twisted it, and raised a trapdoor that creaked as it folded back on its hinges. Hot, stale air rushed out of the opening. It reeked of something moist and foul. Master Han turned his face and covered his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Do you keep a beast down there?"

Servant Pyong lifted the lamp and began descending a rickety ladder that led into the dungeon.

"Yes, sir. Exactly."

Master Han started down after him, his coarse suit of sackcloth rustling and scraping against his skin as he descended. When he stepped onto the stone floor, he felt a slight breeze. Fresh air. Not much, but enough to keep alive whatever lived down here.

Servant Pyong raised his lamp and carried it to the far corner of the chamber. Something growled. Low. Pensive. As if it were eyeing the two intruders and waiting for a chance to spring.

And then Master Han saw it. At first it was just a maze of limbs and hair and digits. But then he realized that it was trying to hide its face and it was wearing a tattered suit of clothes and then he realized that it wasn't a beast at all, but a man.

What was left of the man's clothing were filthy rags. Chains had been wrapped tightly around his bony ankles and bolted to the stone wall. A patch of pasty skin peeped from beneath a tangled matting of white hair, and when the man pulled back his arms, Master Han recoiled at the sight. Bristling white whiskers covered his face from below the chin almost up to the eyes. The irises were the color of emeralds. Like a cat.

But it was the nose that most shocked Master Han. Huge, it

stuck out almost a finger's length from the face. He stepped forward to get a better look, but Servant Pyong held him back.

"Not too close, sir. He is dangerous."

Master Han turned to him.

"Who is he?"

"Not a 'who.' 'What' is more appropriate, sir. He came to us on one of those foreign ships. Shipwrecked on the coast. All his comrades were killed by the constabulary, of course, as they should have been, but this one survived. They brought him to your father. He tried to interrogate him, but the lout can't speak any civilized language. Still, your father didn't have the heart to have him executed. So he put out the story that he had died under torture." Servant Pyong shrugged. "After that, we kept him here."

"Why wasn't he sent to Seoul? To the king's court?"

"Your father's heart was very big." Servant Pyong shook his head. "Too big for the likes of me to understand. He knew that this creature would be tortured at the great palace, and he had taken a liking to him, so we kept him here. No one knew except your father and me. I smuggled slop from the swine's trough for him and cleaned out his vile leavings every few days. You can't tame a wild beast, though. No matter how your father tried to talk to him and educate him in the ways of real human beings, he remained sullen and ungrateful. Since we put him down here, I haven't heard him speak a word. Not even in that monkey talk that he uses."

"How long has that been?"

"Four years."

Master Han surveyed the square room. Maybe half a pyong in area, he thought. Not much bigger than a good-sized tomb. Two small openings near the ceiling allowed a little air to circulate. The only implements in the room were the nightsoil pan and the chains that held the captive. He shuddered at the thought of being stuck down here. It would be enough to drive anyone mad.

The beast rattled his chain and inched forward along the rough stones.

"Get back!" Servant Pyong said. "He's an ornery one, he is, sir. Scratch your spleen out with his filthy claws if you give him a chance."

The emerald eyes shone in the darkness, filled with a vile malevolence.

"Where did you find my father's body?"

"Right here, sir. Not three hand-widths from where you're standing."

Servant Pyong moved the ladder and Master Han knelt down by the spot. There were still traces of blood, but not much.

"Did you clean this floor?"

"No, sir. I should have cleaned it. Your honored father's blood is still here. I will take care of it right away."

"No. That's not what I mean. I just want to know if this was all the blood that was here."

"Well, there was more on his clothes. Quite a bit on his clothes. And still some left on his body and in his wounds." Servant Pyong turned towards the captive. "This foreign demon is efficient in his vile work."

Just as Master Han turned, chains rattled and out of the darkness the demon leapt.

The chains pulled him up short.

Snarling and growling, he clawed the air with gnarled fingers.

"I've seen enough," Master Han said.

Servant Pyong steadied the ladder as his master climbed towards the daylight and the realm of civilized society.

The human beast stayed below, rattling his chains and gnashing his teeth.

When the trapdoor slammed shut, Master Han felt great joy in the silence.

The funeral procession wound through green rice paddies and headed towards the grass covered hills that surrounded the valley. Striding amongst the entourage were provincial dignitaries and an emissary from the king who walked at the side of Master Han, the grieving elder son.

A procession of such powerful people would normally have been spangled with robes of red, blue, and silver, but today everyone wore either white or somber gray: except for the immediate family of the deceased Elder Han. They were outfitted in the coarse cloth of sacks made to hold rice or grain.

Only the palanquin of the dead man betrayed any type of cheer. It was lacquered a bright red and bedecked with bells and sinuous gold dragons. The worries of this world were over for the Elder Han. Celebration was in order.

When he'd looked at the body of his father, Master Han had been surprised at the amount of caked blood on his clothing and in his

wounds. His skull had been cracked. Cho the Herbalist told him that much blood flows from an open wound to the head.

The left side of his father's body, opposite the head wound, was misshapen. Broken bones, Cho said. The arm and a few ribs. Master Han looked carefully at his father's skin. The bruise on the side was extremely faint, as if it had just gotten started and then stopped.

"When the heart stops pumping, the blood stops flowing," Herbalist Cho said.

As far as the people of the valley knew, the Elder Han's heart had faltered and then stopped beating, as is so often the case with older people. Master Han told Herbalist Cho to make sure they kept thinking that way.

The musicians ground out a steady dirge as the procession pounded up the hill. Behind them the green fields stretched to the sparkling blue sea. Fishing boats bobbed near the quay, and long strings of flattened seaweed and cuttlefish dried under the gentle prodding of the noonday sun.

A lovely day to be buried, Master Han thought. He remembered the cold dreary day, so many years ago, when they had buried his mother. How his father had cried. How he had cried.

When the workmen set his father in his burial mound, they faced him out towards the valley and the open sea. Master Han watched his Second Mother drying her devious tears. She was not much older than he, far too young for his father, and very beautiful. But her beauty had no soothing effect on Master Han. A familiar loathing returned.

Bachelor No slipped off his sandals and strode across the wood-slatted floor of what was now Master Han's reception hall. He was a big man, dressed in bright blue robes cinched at the waist by a broad, gold-encrusted leather belt. His horsehair cap was tied atop a simple but robust face on which a few black whiskers straggled down below his chin. The room was filled with mourners, but all were quiet save Bachelor No. He slapped Master Han on the back.

"I suppose you'll be going back to the king's court soon to resume your studies. Or will you stay here and become the patriarch of the valley as your father did?"

Master Han steeled himself against the familiar bullying assault of Bachelor No. He was six years younger than No, and they had known each other all of their lives. As a child Master Han had run



from the young No in order to escape being made sport of, and being pummeled. He remained sitting but straightened his back and shoulders.

"I have made no plans yet, Bachelor No. That would be unseemly, given the brief time that has elapsed since my father's death."

"But you must think of your future," No said, oblivious to the silent stares of those around him. "You're not a farmer. Who would run this place for you? Certainly not your Second Mother." He laughed at his own joke. "You should sell it. To someone like me. And return to the pleasures of the capital with a tidy profit. Then you can bury yourself in those books you love so much."

He looked around the room, smiling broadly at his own astuteness, looking for corroboration. He found none.

Master Han was anxious to sell his father's holdings in the valley. He would love nothing more than to return to the king's court and complete the battery of examinations necessary to become a royal inspector. But he had the clan to think about: aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, and cousins. All dependent on the holdings of the Han family. He had no brothers or sisters to carry the burden for him. And his Second Mother was nothing more than a concubine whom his father had grown inordinately fond of and made the mistake of marrying.

Of course, she had no legal rights. Everything that had belonged to his father now belonged to Master Han. He would not leave her out in the cold, but he thought for the first time how nervous his Second Mother must be. She would remember as well as he the times she had beaten him and hidden his books and lied to his father about some imagined offense, all to alienate him from his father and keep his affections for herself. So she could have more money for clothes and entertainments and could pose to the wealthy people of the valley as a woman of high status.

Master Han shook his head. His Second Mother was too foolish to realize that all those people who came to her social events were laughing behind her back. They all knew that she was an uneducated country girl, fortunate to have become a concubine, much less a wife. And Master Han knew that the same people laughed at the foolishness of his father for having married her. They couldn't understand the emptiness in his father's heart after the death of his first wife, Master Han's mother. But Master Han understood the emptiness. He felt it, too.

As these thoughts flooded through his mind, he kept his face impassive and stared up at Bachelor No.

"If I decide to sell my father's holdings, I will let you know immediately."

"They're your holdings now." He laughed at that, looking around the room again, thinking it a great joke.

Second Mother floated into the room on the billowing cloud of her full red gown. Master Han noticed that a few of his cousins started to rise but thought better of it and sat back down. Second Mother, the former mistress of the house, pretended not to notice.

"Bachelor No," she said. "How pleasant of you to visit us in our time of grief." She clapped her slender palms. "Servant Pyong. Bring us rice cakes, and a pot of tea. All our guests must be hungry."

That was too much for Master Han.

"Cancel the rice cakes!" he roared. He rose from his cushion as he spoke. "My father is dead and in this house we are still mourning him. There will be no frivolity." He locked his black eyes onto his Second Mother. "And no member of our family will show the discourtesy of wearing other than sackcloth until I give the order."

As he stormed out of the room, Master Han regretted the outburst of passion. It wasn't worthy of an educated man. His training told him to resent the pleasure that his rage had given him. But somehow he couldn't.

The next morning he had to face the problem of the foreigner locked in the dungeon. He ordered Servant Pyong to prepare a decent meal and bring it with them as they descended into the cellar.

The foreigner sniffed the food suspiciously at first. But soon his greed overtook his wariness and he inhaled the soup and rice. He ate with his hands, ignoring the spoon and chopsticks that had been provided.

Master Han handed Servant Pyong a cup of barley tea.

"Give him this. I am curious to see how he manages to slake his thirst. Surely he will have to wrap his nose around the side of his head in order to drink."

When the lip of the cup hit the tip of the foreigner's nose, he simply tilted his head back and continued to drink.

"Ingenious," Master Han said.

Servant Pyong snorted.

For the next few days Master Han tried to communicate with the foreigner. He brought paper and brush and a small wooden table and set them up just outside the reach of the chains. He drew pictures, wrote simple messages in the native Korean script, tried Chinese characters, even a smattering of the Japanese syllable writing. Nothing worked. An insolent sneer remained engraved on the foreigner's bewhiskered face.

"Starve him," Servant Pyong said. "That worked before, when he tried to attack me every time I went down there."

Master Han shook his head. "No. This can't go on. We have to gain his trust and find a way to get rid of him. But if I send him to Seoul or reveal his existence to the townfolk here, my dead father will lose face."

Servant Pyong nodded. A son can't go against the wishes of his father, even when he's dead. Especially when he's dead.

"I could kill him," Pyong said. "And bury him in the dead of night."

Master Han sighed. "That would be the convenient way to dispose of him. But I don't want to start my new life with a blood sacrifice."

"But he's only a foreigner."

"He's still human."

"Whatever you say, sir, but he doesn't seem human to me."

"Oh, he is. He's in poor condition right now, but he's human all right. What we must do is give him a small boat and let him go back to his own country."

"But that's illegal. If the king's inspectors got word of it, you could be put on trial. You could be executed. The Great King and his father and his father before him have been consistent on this. We must not allow any foreign contamination to our country. And we can't let a foreign spy return to his own country. Who knows what treachery they would be up to then?"

"He didn't mean to land here," Master Han said. "It was a shipwreck."

"Nevertheless, young sir, this wretch is not worth losing your head over."

"But I won't kill him. We will find a way to get him out of here without anyone seeing him."

"But he killed your father, sir!"

Master Han felt the revulsion and the pain rise in him. He fought to control it.

"The Great Sage said that murder is unworthy of the superior man. So is revenge. We will let him go. Tonight!"

Master Han inspected the water and provisions for the small skiff and helped Servant Pyong bind the foreigner and blindfold him. They waited until the hour of the rat, when everyone in the village was still, and marched him to the sea.

As they untied him, they both pulled swords. When the foreigner took off his blindfold, Master Han pointed towards the skiff. The man had been a sailor, and without so much as a nod he pushed the small craft in front of him and waded into the sea. When he got past the breakers, he clambered aboard, keeping his balance expertly, and set sail towards the Eastern Sea. When the full moon no longer outlined the skiff, Master Han sheathed his sword and he and Servant Pyong trudged wearily towards home.

Master Han inspected his father's ledgers and found everything in order. It was only when he actually went into the orchard and counted the pear trees that he found that there were ten more trees than there were supposed to be. He scratched his head, rechecked the ledger, and decided to count again.

He was almost in the center of the orchard when he heard the *thwunk*.

He dived into the brush. The arrow had missed his neck by less than the width of his hand. He crawled behind the row of trees, and when he thought he was far enough away, he got up and ran, zigzagging through the neatly tended forest until he got within sight of the sprawling homestead. He rested, regained his breath and composure, and entered the gate as if nothing had happened.

Someone had been robbing his father of his rightful income, and if they did it with the pears, he would probably find shortages in the other crops and in the livestock, too.

Bookkeeping was as simple as memorizing a child's first hundred characters to a classically trained scholar, and in less than two days Master Han had a comprehensive list of all that had been pilfered from his father. There must have been more than one person involved to ensure that the excess was extracted from the general harvest without the knowledge of the Elder Han.

Master Han stared with hatred at the awkward scrawl of the previous bookkeeper. The brush strokes were unrefined and timid. The hand of his Second Mother.

\* \* \*

Squealing jolted Master Han upright from his bed. He threw on a robe and ran outside. The anguished cries seemed to have come from the swine enclosure.

He was the first there, and as he approached, his face drained of blood. When the rest of the household ran up, clutching their bedclothes and babbling with excitement, Master Han had to find a secluded place to bend over and vomit.

Servant Pyong had been hanged by his heels in front of the swine shed, his belly sliced open and his still moist entrails left to dangle lewdly over the damp earth.

**I**t wasn't possible to keep this second-murder quiet. The village magistrate asked some polite questions of Master Han and began to prepare his report. No one in the household had seen or heard anything, and the identity and whereabouts of the killer were listed by the magistrate as unknown.

Master Han contemplated telling the magistrate about the thievery and the doctored books, but he kept quiet. The shame to his dead father would be too great. He decided that he had to confront his Second Mother with the evidence immediately. When the furor of the day died down, he went to her in the far wing of the house and slid back the door to her outer chamber.

She bowed when he entered and put aside a book. Master Han caught a glimpse of the title: *Proper Comportment for the Pregnant Woman*.

Why would she be reading such a thing? There was too much on his mind. His overheated brain refused to think about it. He didn't sit.

"You have been robbing my father."

She kept her head down. A jade pin held her straight black hair in a tight bun behind her head.

"You have been altering the records and keeping some of the produce and livestock for yourself. Who helped you separate out the stolen goods and convert them to cash?"

She didn't move.

"Speak to me, woman! Even a superior man would have the right to beat you to death for your crimes."

Her voice pushed its way through her throat.

"I had nothing to do with it. You must believe me. I only recorded in the ledger the figures Servant Pyong gave to me. He was the

foreman for all the farming activities. I know nothing of farming. I am a woman."

She gripped her face with her slender fingers and a puddle of tears quickly formed on the varnished floor.

Master Han marshalled no sympathy for her.

"You're lying," he said, swiveled, and left the room.

Wariness of the unknown murderer allowed little sleep in the Han household for the next two nights. But after nothing more happened, exhaustion flexed its awesome muscles, and everyone collapsed in slumber. Except for Master Han.

He knew that whoever had killed his father must also have killed Servant Pyong. He didn't believe his Second Mother for a moment. She had to be involved.

By the light of the waning moon Master Han fiddled with his sword and paced the grounds of the farm until the cock crowed. He thought of torturing her to get to the truth, but when done by a stepson to a stepmother, it would be a violation of filial propriety and another loss of face for the family. Out of the question. He was an educated man, he should use his wits to get to the bottom of all this, but the facts tumbled around in his brain all night and in the morning he was no wiser.

After breakfast, word came from the village that another man had been murdered. When the name of the victim was mentioned, Second Mother fell to her knees and wept.

Bachelor No.

Then it all became clear to Master Han. Why she had been reading a book on pregnancy. Why Bachelor No had been the first to offer him money for the farm. Servant Pyong must have been in on the scheme with them, to bankrupt his father and take over the farm. The Second Wife would have the financial security and the virile young lover she coveted, Bachelor No would have the land that his family had been eyeing for generations, and Servant Pyong would have a pile of money to start himself up in business somewhere. And then he knew who had the strength to subdue Servant Pyong, hang him up by his heels, and slaughter him like a swine.

It all made sense. But who had killed Bachelor No? Certainly not the Second Wife, she had been here all evening.

A field hand came running, shouting that horses were on the way.

When the magistrate and his men pulled up, Master Han went out front to greet them.

"I am afraid there is no time for formalities today," the magistrate said. "You are under arrest for the murder of Bachelor No."

The No clan had spent much money at the provincial court trying to convince the governor to execute Master Han. They admitted to the scheme to bankrupt the Elder Han, and to the adultery with the Second Wife, but still, they said, that didn't justify murder.

When the provincial inspector held court, Master Han protested his innocence, but as he admitted, he had no proof. The extended Han family had rallied to his defense, and the inspector had hoped to resolve the case without an execution. Everyone in the province knew that if the Han family heir were executed the family would likely go bankrupt and the No family would pick up the leavings. If they became too powerful, they would become a threat to the Lee clan that controlled the provincial government.

The inspector stalled as long as he could, many witnesses were interviewed, but no one who could prove that Master Han hadn't been the one to slice Bachelor No's throat with a knife bearing the engraved clan name Han on the wooden handle.

Finally a sheriff ran into the court and prostrated himself before the provincial inspector.

"Your Honor. Please hold the proceedings. A very strange thing has happened."

"What is it?"

"A monkey, sir."

"A monkey?"

"A very large monkey, who can talk. With white hair and clothes like ours. He is outside. Saying that he is the one who killed Bachelor No."

"Are you trying to disgrace your ancestors?"

"No, sir. It is true. Please let me come in and talk."

The inspector fidgeted in his chair, but the crowd was in an uproar.

"Send the monkey in then."

The sheriff scurried off, and in a moment the door to the court was flung open. In strode a man, dressed like a warrior, with a sword at his side, his face and head covered with curly white hair. The audience gasped. The word "nose" was repeated again and again in the ensuing hubbub.

The man went up and made a courtly bow to Master Han.



The beast from the dungeon.

He had cleaned himself up and gotten hold of some proper clothing, but still he looked very strange to Master Han's eyes. Like an animal dressed up to look like a human.

Then he spoke. The Korean was broken, worse than childlike, but he used his hands often and somehow managed to get his point across.

Master Han and the inspector listened, and the crowd quieted. Spellbound.

"My name is Alfonso de los Santos, harpooner of whales aboard the good ship *Angelic* sailing out of Nantucket."

The crowd didn't understand this introduction but listened intently to this beast speaking something similar to human speech.

"A few years ago, four if my memory serves me well, our good ship was pushed off course and ran aground on the rocky coasts of this here country, Corea. Of course we knew enough to stay away, since we'd heard full well what your king does to stranded sailors, but in this case, unfortunately, we had no choice. Now I understand how a subject must follow the edicts of his king—my own family has been running from the excesses of the king of Spain for some time—so I hold no grudges against those amongst you who executed my shipmates. It was hard, but by your lights it had to be done. I am grateful to the father of this young man here, the Elder Han, for sparing my life. I realize that he had to hide me from your authorities, and although my life in the dungeon was difficult, it was still a life, and therefore better than a death.

"I kept my counsel at first, knowing nothing of your heathen ways, and being fairly well schooled myself and quick of wit, I began to pick up some of your strange tongue. I kept mute, hoping to gain some advantage by understanding when you thought I could not understand.

"The Elder Han was kind to me and tried to educate me, although for the sake of my own hopes of escape, I did not respond to his teachings. Servant Pyong was less kind. He was the foreman of the entire estate and, as such, did not enjoy having to stoop to such menial tasks as emptying out my nightsoil. Therefore, he didn't do it very often. And since he didn't empty the nightsoil very often, the stench got pretty bad, and soon he stopped coming into the dungeon to feed me. Every so often he would toss down some swine slop. I tried to keep my wits about me, primarily by committing every word of your language I heard to memory—whether I

knew the meaning at first or not. But eventually, I must admit, I deteriorated to the level of a beast.

"One night the trapdoor to my dungeon was opened at an odd hour, and to my horror a body was dropped to the floor. It was the Elder Han. I heard the voices of two men above. One I knew. It was Servant Pyong."

A murmur rippled through the crowd.

"The other man was unknown to me, but I heard Servant Pyong call him Bachelor No."

A few men of the No clan rose to their feet and started shouting for the sheriff to remove this mad beast from the midst of civilized society. The provincial inspector shouted them down, and soon the foreigner proceeded with his narrative.

"It was a few days later that Master Han arrived in my dungeon. I discerned that he was the eldest son, returned from the capital to bury his father and take over as head of the family. A noble tradition. In my country of New Spain, or even in the newly-liberated English colonies where I have recently taken up residence, an elder son would do no less.

"He, like his father, seemed to be a wise and kind man, and I had hopes that Servant Pyong would be brought to heel and I would begin to get better treatment. Instead I got something much better. My freedom.

"When I got into the open air and onto the skiff that was so generously given to me, I headed for the open sea. But only to get out of sight and hide my real intentions. I knew that there were over five hundred miles of treacherous waters between me and Japan. But even Japan wouldn't be much more hospitable to the likes of me. My only chance would be to find a foreign whaler pulling into port at the famous seafaring town of Yokohama."

An angry growl erupted from the crowd. Mistrust of the marauding Japanese pirates ran deep.

The foreigner quickly recovered his composure.

"But I knew that I would never cross such an enormous and treacherous body of water in such a small craft without navigational instruments. So I decided to return to land.

"Now, there was nowhere on these shores where I would be safe, so I decided, in the short span of life I was likely to have left, I would take my revenge on Servant Pyong, who had mistreated me, and Bachelor No, who had assisted in the murder of the kindly Elder Han.

"The job turned out to be sweeter than I had thought. I traveled by night until I reached Master Han's fields. During the day I hid and gorged myself on his delicious pears. It was hard to find Servant Pyong by himself until the second night when I saw him outside by himself. He waited and was met by Bachelor No. I overheard their conversation. Master Han was refusing to sell the farm, and the Second Wife had been unable to influence him. The only chance was to murder him and then buy the farm from the Second Wife, who would become Bachelor No's concubine. Some drunken workmen emerged from their quarters at that time, the two men parted, and I didn't get a chance to get near either of them.

"The next day I followed Master Han as he performed his inspection of the orchards. I wasn't as alert as I should have been, so I didn't notice Bachelor No stalking Master Han through the trees. When he took aim with his bow, all I could do was throw a rock at him. It was enough, however, to throw him off his aim. Master Han escaped, Bachelor No retreated, and I waited for nightfall in the trees.

"I watched the main house carefully that night, and it was fortunate that I did, for in the latest hour I saw Servant Pyong sneaking towards Master Han's quarters. Rage overtook me at the way I had been treated by Servant Pyong and the treachery that he had shown towards his masters. I came up behind him and flattened him with a rock. Then I dragged him over to the pigsty from which he had fed me, hanged him by his ankles, and disemboweled him while he was still alive. I ran away when the household awoke to his screams.

"The next day I scouted the countryside until I located the residence of the No clan. At night I slipped into the laundry room and stole the garments you see me in now. Then, the next day, when all the men were in the fields except Bachelor No, I slipped into their home and killed him with the same knife I had stolen from Servant Pyong.

"When I returned to the residence of Master Han, I intended to surrender myself to him and confess everything. Instead I saw the magistrate and his men taking him away. I feared that if I revealed myself too early I would be slaughtered before I had a chance to tell my story and exonerate the young and good Master Han."

The foreigner took off his horsehair cap, waved it in front of him, and bowed from the waist with an unseemly flair.

"Now, sir," he said, "since I have no chance of ever leaving this country or seeing my family again, my life means little to me. That is my confession. Do with me as you will."

Everyone in the chambers seemed to be shouting at once. Men jostled one another, women wept into their hands. Finally the sheriff restored order and the provincial inspector shouted for calm.

He seemed very relieved to have someone to convict for the murders.

"Master Han," he said, "you are cleared of the murders, and you are free to go. As for you, you evil smelling devil . . ."

Master Han stood up. "Please, sir. Bachelor No and Servant Pyong murdered my father. If this man had not killed them, I would have been forced to seek revenge on my own, and who can say how that would have contributed to public disharmony? It seems he did us all a great service, and certainly his feelings were understandable, given the way he was treated. Show mercy, as would the great master Confucius, and let him go on the grounds of justifiable homicide."

"Yes," the inspector said, "if it were just a matter of that. But this man is a barbarian, forbidden by our great king ever to set foot on the sacred soil of our country. The punishment has to be death."

"What if he weren't a barbarian?" Master Han said.

"What do you mean?"

"What if I adopted him as my son? If I put him on my family register?"

"Well, then, of course, it would be all right. He would be a subject of the king, and as such he would be allowed to . . ."

"Then I will adopt him!"

A voice from the No clan screeched in protest. "But he is too old to be adopted as a son."

Neither Master Han nor the provincial inspector had given any thought as to the age of this strange creature.

"How old are you, then?" the inspector asked.

"Forty-seven, sir."

"And your age, Master Han?"

"I have passed twenty-one summers."

The inspector conferred with one of his advisors for a moment, and there was much mumbling in court.

The inspector called for order.

"Well then, Master Han, it is hereby ordered that this fellow,

whatever he is, be placed on your family register as an uncle. An infirm uncle. Uneducated and unsound of mind, to be held under your protection and never to be allowed off the confines of your family lands. Is that understood?"

"Perfectly, Honorable Inspector."

"Then, this hearing is concluded."

The Second Mother returned to her family in disgrace, and although the No clan refused, Master Han saw fit to send her an annual stipend to support her and her child.

It didn't take long for the Han household to get used to their new "uncle." He had a ready smile and a lively, open spirit that never ceased to amaze them. He tried to get them to call him "Alfonso," but they could never pronounce it so they just called him "*byonso*," which means outhouse. He didn't mind. No one loved a joke more than the strange, bewhiskered Uncle Outhouse.

It was many years later, after Uncle Byonso had died and been buried in a family mound, that Master Han—now known to everyone as the Elder Han—had occasion to visit the capital city of Seoul on business.

He noticed a few foreigners down by the Port of Yongdungpo on the River Han and inquired about them. A local merchant explained the change in policy.

"The new king has decided to let a few ships in for trade. This one departs on the tide. A few of our scholars are traveling with them to learn some of their foreign trickery."

"Where is this ship bound?"

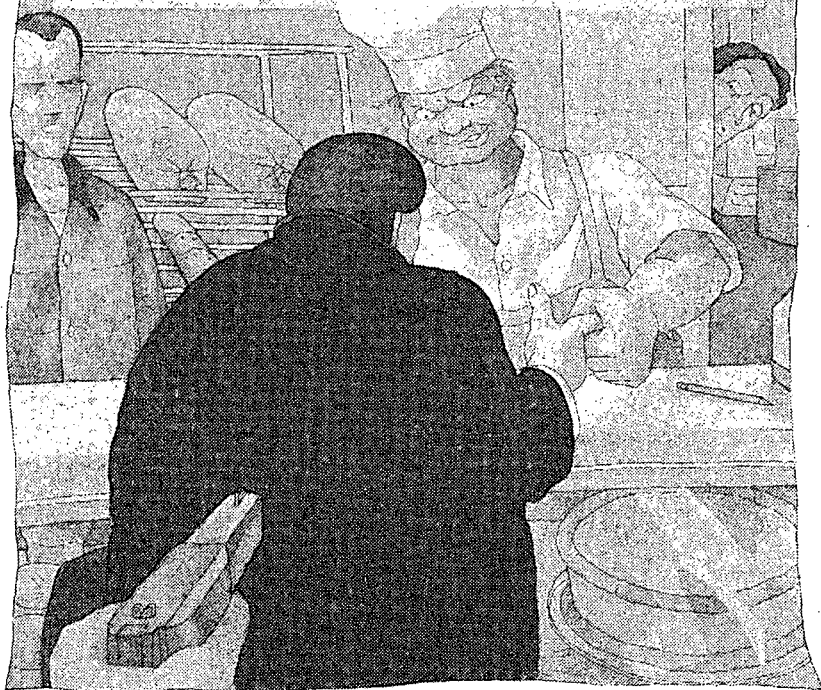
"To some strange city. I cannot pronounce it. Here. Look at the manifest."

The manifest had been printed in both Korean and the strange foreign language. The Elder Han had to sound out the name of the city.

Nantucket, it said.

# The Birthday

by Jas. R. Petrin



**Z**eke tried to tell Ma why she was getting the shoes and not the coat, but she wasn't listening. Telling her, Yeah, Ma, the coat was there, right on the rack just like you said, but see there was this chain through the

sleeve . . . And Ma hollering, asking what *that* had to do with the price of eggs, he couldn't call a sales clerk over, for the love of Mike? Didn't he have a voice, for crying in the sink? A chain through the sleeve! Zeke going, Ma, look, the clerks were



busy, the car was on a meter . . . Ma really yelling now, What's the matter? You got a mittful of slugs your brother gave you, but I got to buy you a parking pass to get a happy birthday here? You weasel! Shoes!

"They're nice shoes, Ma," George put in.

What you tried to do, you said whatever you thought would shut her up.

It wasn't working.

"Nice? You call them damn things *nice*?" Ma screamed. "Them are *tart* shoes, that's what they are! *Tart* shoes! I wouldn't be caught dead on a barbwire fence in shoes like that. I wouldn't be caught face up in a creek, floating. Gah! Blah! Look at 'em!"

You had to look at the shoes, you couldn't ignore them, there in the ripped-open box on Ma Boyer's kitchen table.

George really did like them—he wasn't kidding when he told her that—black patents, with open toes, ankle straps, and four inch heels so thin you could spear olives with them. But maybe, now he thought of it, not the thing for Ma. She went two ten, two fifteen these days, and walked like there was something under her feet she was trying to make sure didn't get up again.

Ma snapped, "Zeke, pour me

a gin, it's the least you can do, smashing my birthday to pieces." She yelled, "And hit it twice, you piker!" Grumbling, "Weasels! Both of you weasels!"

"Now, Ma . . ."

"I'll tell you this for nothing. If I'd of known way back then, all them years, what I'd got there in the delivery room those two times, I'd of screamed for a rain check."

"You don't mean that, Ma," George said.

"I'd of gone out a window on sheets tied together."

"Ma . . ."

"Tart shoes, for the love of Mike!"

Just fuming.

What it was, she'd told them about the coat she wanted, gave them the store and the aisle and the rack it was hanging on. Described it—black leather, ankle-length, masculine cut. All hints and winks. What she hadn't told them was how they were supposed to pay for the goddamn thing.

George followed Zeke into the other room. Watched him snatch up the gin bottle with trembling fingers. George said:

"You know what's coming, don't you? Next she's gonna want to know how come she didn't get a cake. I *told* you to get her a cake. Isn't that what I said when you went out—make sure and also get her a cake?"



Zeke wheeling around to do some hollering of his own, but holding it down to a thin, keening whisper so Ma wouldn't hear. Little red veins in the whites of his eyes.

"You can stand there and tell me that? A guy like you? You ever try to swipe a cake, bro? A *birthday* cake, all that gooey icing? Be scraping it outa my pocket for a *week*!"

The guy bug-eyed after the chewing out Ma had given him.

"We could *buy* her a cake, Zeke."

"With what? I'm down to my last dime, all this chasing around for Ma. I'm flat broke, an' it's all her fault. Hell, bro, listen—I got serious debts to pay. If I don't come up with some scratch real soon, there's a guy goin' to pay me a social call, know what I'm saying? And Ma's on my case about coats?"

"We can get her a cake somehow."

"You get it. I'm not getting her nothing after all I went through for those shoes! Man! That flunky manager, the one with the legs? Chasing me all the way up Notre Dame for seven blocks? I mean, what was it? The guy thinks he's a major shareholder or something, six bucks an hour? Listen, if the old doll wants a cake so bad,

she can go out and swipe one herself."

"You're upset. That's all it is. Calm down. Let's you and me go right now and get her a cake, find a bakery that's open."

"I'll find a bar that's open."

"You're not being fair, Zeke. It's her birthday. She didn't get the present she wanted. The coat. She wants us to fuss over her because of that. It's only natural."

"Ma—that woman—natural? Do you hear yourself? Wanting a man's coat!"

"She said it was the only coat she could find that fit her right. She said she doesn't care which way it buttons."

"Listen, I got her the shoes because I couldn't get her the coat. Trying to make her birthday not turn out a total loss. Thinking on my feet. But do I get any thanks for it? No. All I get—"

But Ma was yelling in the front room again.

"Either one of you weasels think to get me a cake?"

**T**eece drove east along St. Matthews, past Minto Armories where the soldier guys marched. He'd walk to this place as a kid, a block or two, and look in and watch them doing drills like one big machine: all those shiny boots; polished

guns on their shoulders. He'd known they got to fire those guns a lot, too.

In the back he could hear Glassman yakking into his cell-phone again. Worse than a kid with a new toy. Phone everybody. Phone his brothers, his two cousins, his sister in Crystal City. Phone his own number where nobody was, just to listen to it ring. This guy Glassman, thinking he was a big shot while all the time he was a low-glow, no-hope dope—but you had to work for somebody, didn't you?

Not much longer, though.

Glassman put the phone down, said, "Hey!" and poked Teece hard in the shoulder.

He was a poker, Glassman. Like he believed he couldn't get your attention unless he shouted, "Hey!" and jabbed you a lot. You could be with him in an elevator, a little private box, only the whirl of the goddamn pulleys, and he'd go to tell you something and have to say, "Hey!" and poke you one. It got so you were always watching out for that finger of his—now in his pocket, now smoothing back the hair he didn't have, now tapping the top of the briefcase he carried—a finger with a will of its own, like a separate living creature that hadn't got sent to obedience school. Teece dreamed some

nights of that finger. He saw it high up on his wall with a wood screw through it.

Glassman poking him.

"Hey!—hey, One Line. My sister told me a joke. One Line—hey!—you listening to me?"

That was another thing, calling Teece that dumb name—One Line. After Glassman and his duster friends had spiked Teece's rollie tobacco with coke, because Teece only wanted to sit and watch TV and not do any with them, and Teece had forgot about the rugby finals and sloped around the room feeling insightful until the stuff wore off. Teece had a name for Glassman, too—*Gas-man*. The guy so full of it. Put a match to him one day and watch him explode. Bits of black leather coat and briefcase floating down. And maybe a finger.

Glassman poking.

"Hey! My sister on the phone, she goes, What's black and white and dead all over?"

"Red all over?"

"Not red. *Dead*. Hey!" With the finger. "Are you deaf? Don't you listen? *Dead* all over. What is it?"

"I don't know."

The finger leaping to the head rest, leaping to Glassman's bald head, now in the air again, poised to strike. Teece

could see it in the mirror.

"You got to guess."

"I said I don't know. . . . A chicken crossing the road?"

"Wrong. All wrong. Now, listen. Are you listening? Hey? Hey?" Poking. "Here it comes, you ready for it? Answer is—a cop car going over a cliff!"

Glassman fell back into the seat clutching his cell-phone, convulsed with wheezy laughter.

Teece stared at him in the mirror.

"Is that it? Is that the joke? I dunno. It don't make sense. The car's going over—it's still at the top of the cliff—who's dead? You mean at the bottom of the cliff? I think what happened, you musta screwed it up."

Glassman not laughing anymore. "And I think what happened, One Line, you're a guy that's got no sense of humor. Something wrong with the left side of your brain, or your whole brain. We should get you a transplant. Now, when do we get to that bakery, today or tomorrow? Hey? Hey?"

Poking.

"I don't like it," George said. "Something's wrong. You feel it? This bakery's deserted."

"I like it a lot," Zeke said, beginning to push behind the till,

"since you forgot to bring the damn gun along."

"You don't use guns to get birthday cakes," George told him, hauling him back by the belt. "Will you wait a second?"

"Whaddya mean, wait? We need cash. Here it is—"

"I mean we should check the place out first, see what gives. Look at it, the front door open and nobody here, it isn't natural. I don't like it at all."

But Zeke had already sprung the cash drawer.

"Hell. This sucker's empty. Look at this—coupons! Story of my life. Jeez, I just got to get some cash."

There was a swinging door. They went through it and found themselves in a room with wide tables, stainless steel bowls, and an oven up one wall you could bake cakes for Paul Bunyan in. Zeke tugged open a low, narrow door and revealed a storage room. Bags and boxes all stacked. Things dangling from hooks—aprons and stuff.

"Satisfied?" Zeke asked.

He took a baker's cap off a hook and put it on his head. Did a clumsy pirouette and struck a pose. Man, this guy. Grizzled two-day beard, pot gut, broken-heeled boots. And that hat? Like a new Dick Tracy character—Doughhead.

"How do I look?"

George said, "Like a Dick

Tracy character. And no, I'm not satisfied. Why would I be satisfied? I told you, this whole scene isn't right. It don't make sense."

"Oh, I get it," Zeke said, "it's all too easy for you, right?" He said, "Okay, listen, here's a plan you'll like. I go get the cake and take it home. You wait here. Sit down at the table till somebody shows up—I dunno, a cop, let's say—and you tell him how you dropped by to steal a cake, that the owner left the place wide open for you but you're still not satisfied. How about that?"

George looked at him.

"You're a jerk."

"You're a jerk's brother."

"Let's get the cake."

**T**eece slowed the car. He could have stopped right in front, there was plenty of room, but he drove on by and stopped a block away from the bakery; he knew his job. He got out and held the door open for Glassman, who took his time, the guy always making a show out of everything: now brushing the wrinkles out of his long, leather coat; now stooping prissily to drag his briefcase out of the purple velour interior. Look at him, all decked out like a public relations man, this guy who broke teeth for a living. And

him always telling Teece to be discreet. Man.

"Okay," Glassman said, "now remember. You keep that goddamn gun in your pants. I don't wanna see it. This guy is a pussycat, that's what they told me, we only gotta scare him. I tell him what he's gonna do, when he's gonna do it, and that'll be it. He'll probably start to bawl. Fork over what he owes plus ten percent interest. Be so glad to see us leave, he'll give us each a jelly doughnut on the way out."

"What does he look like?"

"Uh?"

"The guy. What does he look like?"

"How do I know what he looks like? What do you care what he looks like? He's a baker, what's a goddamn baker look like?"

Teece shrugged. Following Glassman up to the shop.

George and Zeke were just about to go back out to the front of the shop and pick out a cake; they had the door half open when they heard a muffled voice in the storage room:

"Please? I don't like you to let them kill me."

Zeke looked at George. They let the shop door swing shut and went over to look into the storage room again. Peering in. This time there was a man star-

ing back at them from behind a stack of cartons that had COW BRAND printed on them. Just his head sticking out. His eyes huge. He looked scared out of his mind. He said, "I couldn't help to hear you talking. You are not the men who come to kill me?"

Zeke scratched his chin. "I dunno. Let's see . . . you going to kill us?"

The man shook his head.

Zeke said, "Okay, so we won't kill each other then. How about that?"

The man nodded, starting to grin and relax, relief breaking out on his face. He stood up and flung his arms open wide. "Welcome. Welcome to my shop. Day-old buns half price. What can I do for you?"

George said quickly, "We don't need no buns. We need a cake. A nice cake, something manly, Happy Birthday to Ma written on it."

"I have it, just for you, a most beautiful cake—"

"Hey, not too beautiful," Zeke interrupted. He took off the hat, narrowed his eyes. "How much would it go for, a cake like that?"

"Maybe," the man said, coming out of the storeroom, "not so much." He had a small brown face, tight around the eyes like he was working something out. He took the hat and put it back

on Zeke's head. "Maybe something you can do for me, okay? With a man who comes soon to visit in a leather coat?"

"Leather coat, huh?" Zeke said, suddenly interested.

**T**eece kept one step behind, glancing left and right, watching for cops or anybody else could be a problem. He followed Glassman into the shop and heard bells jingle. Glanced around. Yep, this was a bakery, all right. The smell of the place. Two long glass cases with a few buns and cakes, a couple of pies, and a whole lot of trays that were empty except for loose crumbs—the day's leavings. A counter over there, and a till.

And two guys in the place, one of them wearing a baker's hat.

Glassman, smiling like a TV evangelist, went right up to them. Addressing himself directly to the guy in the tall white hat.

"Mr. Harlajee, Mr. Harlajee! How you doing, pal? We dropped in to see you, Mr. Harlajee . . ."

The two guys didn't look surprised. Not even startled. The guy in the hat was behind the counter, fishing out a birthday cake that had a lot of mucky icing on it, the kind that was

blank on the top so you could have anything you wanted written there, now lifting it carefully out of the glass display case.

Glassman signaled Teece.

Teece pulled the street door shut, locked it, and closed the Venetian blinds.

That got some attention.

"Hey," the baker said, glancing over at Teece and frowning. Teece took a long, hard look at him now, and man, but he was the meanest looking baker Teece had ever seen. A guy that would do his own dental work. And he didn't look like no Mr. Harlajee, neither. More like a Smith, or a Jones, some kinda Anglo ex-con, Teece was willing to bet, a guy with his pedigree in the slammer. Curling his lip now and snarling at Glassman, "Hey, bud, we're closed. Just what is it with you guys?"

Putting down the cake and squinching up his face. Very threatening.

Teece could read the signs, even if Glassman couldn't. He took out his revolver. Nice little Rossi. Letting them see it. He thought, Sure, Gas-man, this guy's a pussycat. Anybody can tell that. Go ahead, and talk to him like you said you were gonna do, and I'll shut up and be discreet just like you told me, while he pulls your

arms off one at a time and whacks you and breaks your kneecaps with them. Or maybe he starts with that finger...

The guy wasn't no Mr. Harlajee.

Glassman didn't see it, though. So caught up in himself.

"Mr. Harlajee," Glassman said, stopping in the middle of the floor and tipping his head slightly to one side, showing how patient he could be, "you know why we're here. You're going to listen to us, aren't you, Mr. Harlajee? You're going to do just what we tell you, and you're not going to give us any trouble. You understand?"

The guy in the baker's hat didn't seem too impressed. Not by Glassman, at least. But he was gazing past Glassman at the Rossi .38 in Teece's hand. The other guy in the shop, maybe he was a customer, not saying anything, just standing there taking everything in with his bland face hanging out.

"I hope I'm getting through to you," Glassman said. But he wasn't sounding quite so sure of himself now, under the baker's steely glare. The other guy in the shop nodded—the guy with his face hanging out, not the baker in the hat.

Glassman began moving in on his victim. The way he al-

ways did. Turning the screws up a notch to get some sweat.

"Okay, I'm gonna remind you, Mr. Harlajee. What we're here for, what we want, is for you to just hand over the money you been keeping back. Thought you could hold out on us—*hey?*" Grinning a little to show he could take a joke. Poking the guy. "Thought you could do a little back room bookkeeping, cut back the overhead—*hey?* Thought you could—"

Without saying a word, not getting excited or anything, just frowning like Glassman was some obnoxious kid who had wandered in off St. Matthews, the mean-looking guy took hold of Glassman's finger before it could drive into him another time and held onto it. Tight.

Glassman squealed. The guy was really strong, holding Glassman there like that, pinned.

Teece couldn't do anything with Glassman in his line of fire; he might as well have been armed with a water pistol.

"Tell you what," the baker said, like he'd been giving a lot of thought to it, his jaw thrusting out, his little eyes glittering, "I been makin' deals today. Maybe I'll make one with you. You stop sticking this finger into me an' I won't bust it off,

stomp on it, and shove it up inside your person to where you won't be able to point it any more. Could you go for that, pie-face? What do you think?"

Pie-face, Teece thought.

Love it.

The quiet guy spoke for the first time, nudging the baker and saying in a sort of undertone, "Notice the coat?" Both of them looking up and down Glassman's shiny leather coat now, giving it the eyeball, more like a couple of fashion designers than guys in a bakery with a gun pointed at them.

The mean one going, "Yeah ... Yeah ..." Nodding his head. Scowling. Like he was mentally taking the measurements.

Strange guys, all right. They had Glassman right where they wanted him. But Teece was okay. He stayed right where he was, parked in front of the door, feeling at ease with the Rossi in his hand. In control. Knowing he could turn things around any time he felt like it, although for the time being he was fascinated, watching the guy in the hat stand up to Glassman, a scene he'd never witnessed before. It was fine. It was like taking in a movie. You only needed popcorn.

Glassman had completely lost his train of thought. He eased his hand out of the



baker's grasp and put it away in his pocket, safe. Then he stood there. After a minute, he tilted his head to one side and said, "You *are* Mr. Harlajee, ain't you?"

"Don't I look it?" the mean guy asked.

Glassman remained quiet a few more seconds, then turned around, really steamed, his face glowing red, barking at Teece, "And what're *you* getting paid for, stand there with your thumb in it all damn night?"

**M**a Boyer sat quietly in the house and watched the sun go down all around her, dark shadows climbing up out of the corners. The house was real quiet with the weasels out somewhere. Sometimes there were little creaks and pops in the walls, groans in the lousy plumbing. That's all you heard.

Wondering: where the hell have those rotten sons of mine got to? Call this a birthday? I could drop dead right here, right in this spot, and not have nobody to take and pull a sheet over me.

Sons.

Who needed 'em?

Sons or birthdays.

The phone rang, and she picked it up. She listened to

Louie, who was her youngest son and only a half-brother to the weasels, tell her he would really just love to come on over and give her a great big birthday kiss, but gosh he had a church group meeting tonight, Ma, so he'd have to take a rain check on a piece of cake, and, well, maybe drop by some other time, maybe tomorrow, Ma, if that was fine with her, okay?

Ma hung up the phone.

Louie seemed to be always busy with that church since he'd been born again. Maybe he had the right idea. Maybe that's what *she* needed—to be born again. Take another kick at the cat and this time around not bother having sons that grew up and turned into weasels and abandoned you.

Rain check on some cake, Louie had said.

What cake?

Ma sighed, feeling punk. No coat, no cake, just a pair of tart shoes lying there on the table. Look at them. You'd have to have legs thin as gooseneck lamps to walk around in shoes like that. And a butt that was shaped like a valentine.

It wasn't fair.

All the stylish clothes they had designed for the skinny broads of the world, those dolls with their bones sticking out like last night's Thanksgiving turkey...

Mind you—suddenly remembering this—she had been taking a few pounds off herself in the last week or two. Maybe . . . thoughtfully, she crossed the room. She picked the shoes up out of the box and studied them a little more carefully.

**T**he man with the gun in his hand marched George and Zeke back into the baking area, spotted the little storage room, and pushed them into it. Slamming the door and shoving a box in front of it. Then they heard the two men walking away, the one in the coat going, "What you think I pay you for, you're just gonna stand around and watch me take abuse? Hey? Hey?" His brassy voice fading.

"They didn't even search us. We should've brought the Colt Trooper," Zeke said.

It was dark in the storage room, just a thin, pale line marking the bottom of the door. Then, without warning, a light winked on.

George rubbed his eyes. Squinting, he saw it was the real baker, the skinny guy squeezing the sides of one of those little key chain flashlights, about one candlepower, holding it up.

"How do you do?" the baker said.

Zeke thrust his jaw out:

"Aside from the fact we could of got shot by that second guy with the gun you forgot to mention, I guess we're top shelf, pal, right up there with the Polski Ogorkies."

"Ah, yes indeed, the gun," the baker said, looking apologetic. "He always brings it, a gun. I don't know. My friends, that is what they tell me. The thin one always with the fat one, and the thin one always brings the gun."

"So these guys, they shake you all down, huh?"

"No, no. They don't shake us down or up. Only making us to pay the money, the money, all the time the money . . ."

"Oh, that's different. They must be okay guys then, huh?" Zeke turning to George. "Get Ma a cake, you said, remember? All your idea. Take me outa here, will you? Now? Right now?"

Teece said, "So whadda we do?" leaning against the wall out in the shop again, the Rossi tucked away and feeling solid and dependable down there, tight against his belly.

Glassman was at the till, an old fashioned enameled thing with a Happy Face sticker on it—Have a Nice Day—punching it open and looking into the cash drawer. Then pulling the

drawer right out and looking under it. Finally turning it upside down and shaking it as if he didn't trust his eyes, not finding a dime and hurling the drawer across the room.

It hit the far wall, bounced off, and crashed to the floor.

Glassman, the poor little guy, was definitely not having a Happy Face day.

"What do we do? You got the nerve to stand there and ask me what do we do? I dunno what we do! Maybe we take this place apart one stick at a time until we find that money. Maybe that's what we do."

"Tools," Teece observed, studying the walls, the ceiling, the floor. Feeling very objective. "We'd need tools. Wrecking bars, stuff like that. Coupla hammers . . ."

"What do I look like?" Glassman shouted, moving in close so he could give Teece a sharp poke. "Hey? Some carpenter left his tools in the car, is that what I look like to you? Hey? Hey?"

Teece was reminded of how the mean-looking guy had reacted a minute ago, dealing with that finger. He felt tempted to try it himself. All you had to do was reach out, grab it, and bend it back until it snapped. Then he thought, no, not now. But sometime. Sometime real soon.

"We ain't gonna find it," Glassman said. "All we can do, what we *gotta* do, I guess, is drag that baker back out here and *make* him tell us where the cash receipts are."

"Think that'd work?" Teece wasn't so sure. Remembering the baker. There were people, they were soft like melons, put some pressure on them, suddenly they were giving you everything they had. This guy, well, he was something else. You could squeeze a brick, but what did you get out of it?

"Bring him out here again," Glassman said.

"Why don't you make up your mind?"

"Just bring him back out here, smart-ass, okay?"

"You know what? We could starve," Zeke said.

"Don't be ridiculous," George told him, "all this stuff in here? Last us for months."

"All this stuff in here," Zeke snapped, "is for baking. What are you telling me? You wanna eat baking powder? Mouthfuls of flour?"

"We got a baker sitting right here."

"Gee, that's right, how forgetful of me. What's he do for an oven? Bake with the heat from his key chain? Little muffins. I can see 'em. Size of number 10 shot . . ."

They heard footsteps approaching. Mr. Harlajee ducked and vanished just as the door swung open again.

"Come outa there," the thin man ordered, leaning in, motioning with the gun.

"I like it in here," Zeke snapped.

"Sure you do. I can see that. But my partner's got some questions, wants to ask you about the money."

"That little goof? Is he your partner? Pal, I got to tell you, stick an ad in the paper and find somebody else. Partners like that, you put a chain on their leg, a little red suit on them, and you don't crank the organ too fast in case they fall over their tails when they go for the money—"

The gun went off. A sharp, cracking sound. A small mushroom-shaped cloud slowly rose over a sack of Robin Hood flour no more than four inches from Zeke's head. A stream of flour sifted out onto his shoulder.

"I like you," the thin man said, "but come outa there. Okay?"

**F**ind a guy, take him out of a blue collar bar. A guy who doesn't shave or get a haircut very often, who wears plaid shirts that smell of tobacco and sweat. Would you have a baker? Tak-

ing him up front to see Glassman, Teece thought, this guy I know, I seen him all over the place, seen him in every scum dump I ever been in, seen him in holding cells, seen him in diners eating buck fifty breakfasts, seen him on bus station benches—I *know* this guy.

And then there was Glassman.

He'd met a few Glassmans, too. They were a different type entirely. If hard guys had to belong to clubs, have a membership, the baker and Glassman would be carrying different cards. Glassman didn't eat buck fifty meals. Glassman, Jeez, pick him up at Charlie's, at Dubrovnik's, pick him up at Hy's, the guy is always sticking it to you what a wonderful meal he had, what a gorgeous waitress, what a tasty wine. Season's tickets to Rainbow Stage. Ask him where he's going—Oh, just run me down to the Fort Garry, think maybe I'll put a couple hundred on a color, have some hors d'oeuvres, give a long-legged lady the eye and see what turns up . . .

Two guys riding the system, but oh, so different. The baker, he was a guy Teece understood. But Glassman—no, never. The man was too strange. You could drive for a two-headed Martian and you wouldn't understand him either.

Like now, as Teece was bringing the baker back into the room. Check Glassman out. The guy hanging up his leather coat, slipping his suit jacket off, rolling up his neat white cuffs. Sinister smile. Coming on like that dentist in *The Marathon Man*, the guy with the drill. You won't talk, huh? All right, this ain't gonna hurt you—much.

And the mean-looking baker? How was he taking this? Hell. Might as well threaten him with a rolled-up magazine. He was staring hard at Glassman with his lip curled up.

"You still here? Thought I told you to get lost."

This from a guy they'd locked in a storeroom at gunpoint.

Glassman advanced toward the baker, seemed about to take a swing at him, then stopped. This time not so sure he wanted to get too close. Tugging his fingers, popping them; tugging his fingers, popping them. Head on one side. Like the baker was a specimen he'd never run into before—which he was, that was a fact. Nobody had ever stood up to Glassman this way, none of the shopkeepers, not so far as Teece knew.

The baker standing his ground. His partner out of the storage room, watching the scene from the open doorway.

It was a room Glassman

wasn't used to working. No chair to shove the guy down in and have Teece tie him up. Nothing to tie him *with*, unless you pulled the cord out of the Venetian blinds and used that. Glassman had to look *up* at the guy. Study the baker like a midget wrestler wondering what hold to use on Andre the Giant.

"You gonna tell us where the money is, pal?" Glassman asked, trying to put a lot of stuff on his voice.

"No."

The mean-looking guy folded his arms.

"You mean you're not gonna cooperate?"

"No."

Glassman thought about that, breathing.

"What if I was to tell this guy—" he jerked a thumb at Teece "—to squeeze off a shot and put a hole in you?"

"Sure. And what if I was tell *that* guy—" the baker nodded at his friend in the bakeroom door "—to squeeze off a shot and put a hole in *you*?"

Glassman frowned and stepped back a foot. A sudden look of concern on his face. "What the hell you talking about? Shoot me? Shoot me with what? You don't even have a gun. *He* don't have a gun."

"You sure about that? You look through his pockets?"

Glassman swallowed. Glanced from one to the other.

"Well, even if he does have a piece, my man here would shoot him before he could get two shots off."

"Yeah," the mean-looking guy said, "it's possible. But my guy only needs to get one shot off, don't he? At you. Nine millimeter. Make a hole in you they could shove a meat hook in when they drag your body outa here."

Glassman was getting red again, growing taller, rising up on the tips of his bright, glossy shoes. Looking like he was dying to take a swipe at the baker but not daring to. So instead he rounded on Teece.

"Is this guy right? You didn't pat these fellas down?"

Well, Teece had to admit Glassman had him there. Forgive me, father, for I have sinned. No, he had not patted anyone down, not looked into the pockets of either one of these two guys.

Glassman, thinking he had a target now, came boring in on Teece, demanding, "You didn't, hey? Didn't, hey?" Finger just a-pumping. "Why didn't you look in their pockets? What do you get paid for? Hey? Hey?"

When the chubby guy in the shirtsleeves said Hey! that last time, and then poked the thin

man who was holding the gun, the thin man put his gun away in the waistband of his pants. Then he reached out and took hold of the finger, twisting to make the chubby guy scream and pivot on his toes, arm bent up steeply behind him like a bird with a broken wing. The thin man then jerked the offending finger up to the level of the chubby guy's shoulder blades and shoved the chubby guy hard at the display case, shattering two of the big glass panels, crushing a basket of buns, driving the chubby guy straight through the frame and half out the other side.

The chubby guy lay there face down, twitching, half in and half out of the case, his tail in the air and his gray-trousered legs wide apart.

The thin man looked at Zeke.

"You know, I got to tell you, I been wanting to do that for a real long time."

"I was you," Zeke advised him, "I'd kick his butt for him while I was at it."

The thin man nodded and took a stride forward.

**I**n the car Zeke said, "Whaddya mean, don't give her the coat? It's black. It's leather. It's what she wants. Look at it."

"It's a used coat, Zeke. And it's a man's. It's cut wrong."

"It's cut like the one in the store. That was a man's coat, wasn't it? *Ma* is cut like a man. It's cut like *her*."

"Okay, but you can't give her a coat that's been used."

Zeke looked sly.

"What if we swung by that store, we could go to that coat she asked for, swipe the tags off it, and hang them on this one. She'd never know. This coat's like new. Not a mark on it."

"You try and give *Ma* a used coat, she'll give you what that jerk in the bakery just got. Only worse. And I'll help her."

"Lighten up," Zeke told him. "Will you lighten up?"

"I'll lighten up soon as you start talking sense. Now. Do we stop by the church, pick up Louie, and bring him over for cake, or just what?"

"I can't face Louie right now."

"Why not?"

"I dunno. It's just I feel wired right now. And Louie, he's too gentle."

"How can anybody be too gentle?"

Zeke said, "He just is. It's like he opens his mouth and air freshener comes out?" And then he added, suddenly very smug, "Good thing those goons were too dumb to look in our pockets, huh?"

"They were pretty dumb, all right."

"And after all that, what we went through, you better believe I'm gonna give the coat to *Ma*."

"It's your funeral."

"I told you I got debts. It'll be my funeral if I don't get *Ma* off my case so I can go out and spring me some cash in a hurry."

*Ma* called from the front room, "Where were you two?"

"We just slipped out, *Ma*."

"Tell me something I don't know. Drunk as the last living lords, I bet. And on my birthday."

"No, *Ma*, listen, we only went to pick up the cake we ordered."

"Yeah," Zeke said. "Come and see what we brung you, *Ma*."

She came to the kitchen doorway and peered in suspiciously. Seeming taller.

"You ordered me a cake?"

"Well, sure, *Ma*, we ordered it." That much was true. "You don't think we'd try and bake one ourselves, do you?"

"Bake a cake? You weasels? Huh. Burn the house down, you mean. Let's see it." She pulled the lid off the box. "Sure. Look at it. I bet you got a discount. It's got 'birthday' spelt wrong. Should be two words. And where's the candles?"

Still upset, but she was softening, though: you could see



that. Reaching and getting a knife out of the drawer.

George said, "Ma, 'birthday' is one word, honest. And the candles—"

Zeke interrupted and tried a joke. "We didn't get you no candles on account of we were afraid to set the ceiling on fire." He glanced at her hopefully with his grin quickly fading. "Ma? Come on, Ma. That was a gag. Don't look at me that way with a knife in your hand." He patted her shoulder, talking earnestly, "Listen, about the coat—"

"Forget it," Ma said.

"No, we don't wanna forget it. See, we were just kidding you before. Trying to get you going. Whyn't you look what's hanging on the back of the door there."

"Huh?"

Ma spotted the coat. Went to the door, looked at it. Ran her hand over the smooth blackness of it. Took it down off the hook and held it out to Zeke, who helped her into it. It fit her perfectly.

"Just your size, Ma."

Ma's eyes were puffy.

"You weasels. Teasing me like that. An' guess what. I'm

wearin' the shoes, too. See?" They looked down. The coat reached almost to the floor, but they could see she had the shoes—the tart shoes—on her feet. Wiggling her red-painted toes. "I can squeeze into 'em, now I lost all that weight." Ma. What a sight. Black leather wrapped around a fullback—in high heels, yet. She thrust her hands deep into the coat pockets, then looked puzzled. "What's this?"

She pulled something out.

George glanced at Zeke. Zeke shrugged.

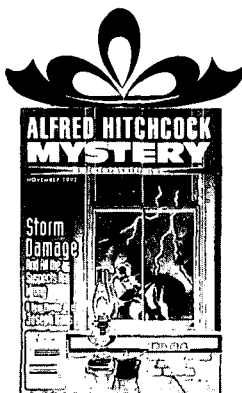
Ma was clutching a thick roll of bills.

"Money, too? Hell, I guess you aren't such weasels after all."

She slipped the elastic band off the wad and began counting twenty dollar bills, moving her lips.

George said, "I guess those goons weren't the only ones too dumb to look in a pocket." He turned to examine Zeke's face. Dark emotion moved there, something brutish close to the surface. George knew he had to speak for the both of them, so he said: "Well, is this where we sing Ma Happy Birthday? Or just what?"

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YNWH-8

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# Trouble on 98th Street

by Frank Taubes



*Illustration by Steve Cavallo*

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**N**inety-eighth Street was quiet. The usual shabby noonday crowd milled on the sidewalk—dirty children, women in ill-fitting cotton dresses, old men. The Park Avenue of duplex apartments and skyscraper penthouses came to an end only two blocks away. Here there were only the tenements and the city dust.

A siren sounded somewhere far away in the city. It came closer, and still the people of 98th Street paid no heed. The police came often, for robbery was a daily occurrence and violence and murder were commonplace happenings in this neighborhood.

But suddenly the siren was shrill. A sedan tore around the corner and raced up the wrong way of the one-way street. The car swerved crazily, colliding with opposite sides of the curb and sending pedestrians running for cover. The car was out of control. It jumped the curb, grazed a row of storefronts, and came to a grinding stop. Two men jumped out, ran toward a tenement building, and disappeared in the doorway as the pursuing police car screeched around the corner. The police car pulled up behind the sedan, and the officers got out.

"Call in for help," one of them yelled. "I'll try to hold them here."

Fifteen minutes later police cars stood blocking the entrance to the street. The cars had pulled onto the sidewalk, pointing their jaunty noses at the buildings. The curious crowd came from their hiding places and stood pressed close against the cars, trying to see what was going on.

In the center of the block, sheltered by a police emergency truck, a middle-aged captain was addressing a group of policemen.

"The killers are trapped on the fourth floor," he was saying. "When they see we have them cornered, they'll probably surrender. I don't want any heroics, no pensions for widows. At the signal, take your positions and wait for orders by loudspeaker. And watch your fire. This is a residential area."

The policemen moved restlessly. Johnny Lloyd looked at the men around him. They showed the small, expectant signs of men who feel danger. They clenched their fists, bit their lips, noiselessly shuffled their feet over the rough pavement.

He too could feel the restlessness and the excitement. Pictures of the fugitives flashed through his mind. The door barricaded from the inside . . . men crouched low, keeping their heads below

window level . . . waiting . . . afraid . . . defiant.

He wondered if they were old or young. Many of those arrested nowadays were kids. The boy gangs that roamed the streets began initiating midget members as young as eight.

He didn't know anything about the men they had trapped, for the detail had only been told that it was an emergency. Waiting for it to get started was the worst part. Always the waiting, while the fear tried to worm its way inside and take over. He endeavored to concentrate on what the captain was saying.

"We'll try to drive them out with tear gas. The more shooting we do, the more chance there is of hurting a bystander. Now I want you to take your assigned places. And keep under cover."

The men darted from behind the shelter of the truck. Johnny headed toward the building across the street. He had been told to take up his post just below the fourth floor and cut off a possible break down the stairs.

His eyes turned from the prowling cars to the drab four and five story brownstones. Their fronts were shabby, neglected, with rusty fire escapes clinging to the façades. He didn't like duty in the tenement district. Somehow, the atmosphere of the place he worked shaped his mood. When an emergency called them to the East End Avenue section or to Beekman Place, he felt aristocratic on his seventy-five-dollar-a-week salary. But up here it was just drudgery.

He went up to his post on the third floor, stopping short at the sight of a patrolman leaning against the staircase.

The patrolman grinned, and his face fell into deep folds. "Hiya," he said.

His eyes went to Johnny's chest and for a moment stayed on the enameled bar, a departmental citation for valor.

"Name's Dunnegan," he said. "From Traffic Division F."

Johnny shook his hand. "Johnny Lloyd. Emergency duty, attached to the 23rd Precinct."

Dunnegan thought for a moment. "Lloyd. Johnny Lloyd," he said slowly. "Some guy called Lloyd brought in a couple of killers last year, didn't he? The Dillard brothers. Made a big splash in all the papers."

Johnny nodded.

"And the year before that he did something real brave, too."

Johnny didn't answer.

"Well, well, what do you know," Dunnegan said, exaggerating



the rhythm of his words. "A hero. I always wanted to meet a real hero."

They looked each other over. Dunnegan smiled weakly in the face of Johnny's careful scrutiny. "Catching a little smoke," he said. "Me and my partner were the first ones up here."

"What's the story?" Johnny asked.

"They held up a bar and grill on First Avenue and shot up the place. Some guy got the license number of the getaway car. The telegraph bureau sent out the alarm, and we spotted the car cruising up Lexington Avenue. They gave us a chase and then cracked their car up downstairs. They made for this house. Now we've got them holed up. So we sent for more men, and you came to the rescue."

"You can't very well handle it by yourself," Johnny said.

He looked at the man next to him. Dunnegan was about fifty and beginning to get paunchy. He must have been close to his twenty-year retirement eligibility.

"Like this sort of work?" Dunnegan asked him.

"I like it."

"Give me your job every time. Emergency service. Plenty of time to relax, just sit on your can and wait for a call. Shoot the breeze, play cards. No pounding a beat up to your hips in snow or letting the wind and rain beat your face to a hamburger."

"It has its disadvantages, too."

"Like what? There's nothing better. Of course I can't kick. I've got patrol-car duty. Driving instead of walking and catching up on your sleep at night." He winked and poked his elbow in the direction of Johnny's ribs. "That's for me."

Johnny wondered what was going on upstairs. The captain had posted two men on the roof of the building and two men on the floor above. There wasn't a chance for the fugitives to escape, though they might try to make a break.

He turned to Dunnegan and noticed that the officer had taken out his service revolver and put it on the windowsill.

"Better be ready, Lloyd. If they come this way, we'll pour it into them. Drop 'em before they get a chance to nail us. I bet a guy like you knows all about that kind of thing, eh?"

Dunnegan was fortifying himself with tough talk, Johnny thought. He recognized it from his own desire to do the same, to let this shell of false hardness settle about himself like a shield. The greater the fear, the tougher the talk. It was such a simple

antidote . . . and better, maybe, than trying to deny it completely, as something alien to his will.

"You don't look too happy," Dunnegan said. "What's the matter, wouldn't you like another pat on the back from the police commissioner?"

Johnny shrugged his shoulders and looked away from Dunnegan. Dunnegan was leaning against the wall, the only outward sign of excitement the steady puffing of his cigarette.

And then, suddenly, Johnny saw himself like Dunnegan, somewhere in the muddled future, plagued by dissatisfaction, his mind closed to his own idea of what a good cop should be. Not someone afraid and hating his job, but someone working in harmony with the career he has chosen. For it was a career now while once—four years ago—it had only been a job, a way out.

He remembered those days clearly. He'd been given his honorable discharge, and then Mickey and he were married. His last few days in the army and the new days as a civilian were filled with the prospect of a new life. One day he was a soldier, his days planned, sheltered, fed, paid. And the next he was cut adrift, pushed back into a different world.

If it had not been for Mickey he would have been lost. But Mickey meant new responsibilities. He remembered one particular day during that first week. Mickey and he were walking through Central Park. In his wallet were three hundred dollars of his mustering-out pay.

They walked along the paths in silence. It was fall, and the leaves were a thick carpet underfoot. He kicked at the leaves and sent a shower of them swirling into the air.

"Leaves are beautiful in the fall," she said. "What makes them turn red?"

He didn't answer.

"First they're green and in a few days they're bright yellow and red, almost opposite in color."

"It's not as romantic as it sounds," he said. "There's iron in leaves. Iron turns to rust."

"Much too chemical," she said. "When I was a little girl, I was told that the leaves blush because the tree is losing its dress."

He chuckled. "Maybe."

She tugged at his arm and he looked at her. "What's the matter, Johnny?"

"I've got to get a job," he said.



She tried to be cheerful. "Okay, Johnny. People get jobs every day."

"What'll I do? Run errands? Wash dishes? Before the war I went to college for only one year. Maybe I should learn a trade. How'll we live?"

"There are many things to do. It's a big world for us," she said.

"I can go back to school. We can live on the thirty dollars a week the government would give me, providing you get a job and support me."

"Easy, Johnny. We'll find a way."

"Okay, let's find one," he said. "I've got three hundred dollars. That'll carry us for a snappy five or six weeks. When that's gone I can start drawing my twenty-dollar-a-week pension. Think we can possibly eat filet mignon on twenty bucks a week?"

"That isn't the only way," she said. "How about a job in an office, a law office, for instance? You might attend night classes and work toward a degree."

He knew he couldn't joke or wisecrack about it any more. He couldn't think of being pinned down behind a desk, passive, sitting still. The last four years had moved too fast. His life had been like a race, a race that was crazy with speed.

Some time later he was urged to take a civil service examination. If he joined the police force, it would mean security. Three months at the police academy and three months on probation and he'd be a part of the permanent force. It might be the beginning of a career. The mayor of New York himself had started as a policeman. It seemed like a perfect solution. The work would be outdoors. He liked the city, liked walking through it and talking to its people.

He must have been smiling, for suddenly he felt Dunnegan's eyes.

"What are you daydreaming about?"

"Nothing."

"You better stay on your toes or those guys'll come down here—and pffft." He pointed his index finger at Johnny, imitating a revolver. "Pffft, pffft," he said. His eyes twinkled shrewdly. "Say, you're not having a case of nerves, are you? Not *you*?" He laughed again. "Not on account of just a couple of killers?"

"How do you know they're killers?" Johnny asked.

"Do you think they'd have a riot truck full of equipment here if they weren't?"

There was a sudden burst of fire cutting into Dunnegan's words.

A loud voice yelled an order and cursed. Feet stamped over the floor.

Shots ricocheted through the hall.

Again a volley of shots and the sharp cracking of splintering wood. A policeman cursed, then shuffled into view. He was holding his shoulder. A thin line of red seeped through his tightly clamped fingers. He brushed past Johnny.

"Cover the rear fire escape," someone shouted from upstairs.

"Watch the splinters from that door!"

"Why the hell don't they get the tear gas up here?" bellowed the policeman.

Johnny felt the impact of the first shot as if it had been meant for him. His mind was alert, sharply conscious of everything going on around him. His body was tense. He was aware, aware of separate sensations . . . the tight knot in his stomach . . . the quick beat of his heart . . . the cold moisture on his forehead. And between these sensations was the emptiness of limbs turned to clay.

He gulped air deeply, trying to hold himself together. Soon, he said to himself. Soon, soon.

The action above him had subsided. He glanced at his partner. Dunnegan had been too busy to notice him.

Dunnegan pointed to the stair where a short stretch of hall was visible. "If they get past the men upstairs, they'll head our way. As soon as you see their legs coming down the hall, start pulling the trigger fast. See what I mean? I've been through these things plenty of times," the old policeman went on. He turned to Johnny and held his gun toward him. He grinned nervously. "You're not supposed to mutilate city property, but I carved them on."

On the butt of his revolver were carved four small notches. "Don't take any chances. As long as it's in the line of duty, don't take any chances."

Suddenly he envied Dunnegan. It was such an easy way to feel about his job.

"I bet you're an ex-GI," Dunnegan was saying.

"Four years," Johnny said.

"Join the force afterwards?"

"That's right."

"I thought so," Dunnegan said. "You guys get all the breaks. All the promotions and all the gravy goes to the guys that were in the army."

"What can I do about it?"

"Nothing. It's just the lousy ways of the world," Dunnegan said. He paused to light a new cigarette. "You know, it's a funny thing about you new guys being so touchy. Now take me, for instance. I was in the first war. Sixty-third Artillery. Now *that* was rough—"

His words were cut off by the emergency loudspeaker. "Attention, attention," the captain's voice said. "We have you completely surrounded. Come out with your hands up."

"Wasting his time," Dunnegan said. "Smoke 'em out with tear gas and nail 'em as they come out the door. Save the state the expense of a trial."

"This is your last warning," the captain repeated. "Come out with your hands above your heads."

Then the loudspeaker clicked off and the street was silent. Johnny could almost taste the tension as the seconds ticked into minutes. He could hear the dull heterogeneous hum of the city, and tried to pick out the distant sounds . . . a car motor starting . . . the hoarse cry of a river foghorn . . . the metallic rattle of the elevated . . . a woman's shrill voice calling the name of a child. Then, suddenly, all the city sounds were drowned out by a dull explosion. They had shot a tear gas shell at the fourth floor window. It was a great relief, and he filled his lungs. It was over. The waiting, the worst part, was over and the rest . . .

He heard the thud as the tear gas container bounced off and fell back down into the street.

"Missed," Dunnegan said. "I knew they wouldn't be able to use tear gas. Those guys up there ain't so dumb. They closed the old shutters."

"More waiting," Johnny said.

"Don't worry. Worrying makes gray hairs," Dunnegan said. "Two to one the captain'll ask for volunteers and we'll go busting in the front door."

Johnny didn't answer, and Dunnegan cracked a laugh. "I said volunteers, kid. They won't *make* you go."

"Why don't you leave it alone?" Johnny said.

"I sympathize. When they give a guy a medal, he wants to look pretty. He doesn't want to dirty his uniform."

"You talk too much," Johnny said.

"Don't kid me," Dunnegan said. "I can see you sweating. That's the trouble with all this young stuff that joins the force. Plenty of flash, plenty of thinking, but not enough doing."

"Okay, go yourself up those last stairs and show me just how it's

done," Johnny said. He heard another volley of shots. Suddenly he could think only of that night two years ago. He tried to shut it out of his mind, but the picture of the boy was before his eyes. He didn't want to remember it or even to admit that it had happened. . . .

It was his second year on the force, and a windy winter night. A light sheet of January snow covered the streets. It was city snow and a million pairs of city feet were already grinding it into slush.

During that year Johnny had a beat to walk, and the night shift always seemed twice as long. Mickey was at home, listening to the radio, mending, washing, reading, waiting. Though he usually enjoyed being out in the open city, he wanted to be near her now.

That might have been why his thoughts had wandered. At the end of the block was a small all-night delicatessen. As he crossed the street, he looked up from the pavement. There was something wrong in the store. The owner was standing near the cash register, his hands high in the air.

Instinctively Johnny reached under his coat and pulled out his service revolver. A moment ago he had been calm. Now he could feel the blood swelling his temples with excitement.

The person in the store was half hidden behind the counter. The whole thing took only a second. Johnny stepped to the sidewalk, trying to keep his feet from creaking on the crisp snow. He pulled the door open and recalled the tinkle of bells.

The stranger whirled and in that moment the panic leaped into Johnny's mind, and his thoughts did not belong to him. He was back in a shallow trench, digging himself into the soft earth, shutting out the piercing scream of a high-explosive shell.

He saw the muzzle flash and felt the recoil as he fired once, twice, and again. He saw the figure sinking slowly and painfully to the ground.

And only then did he notice the boy's face—sixteen, eighteen years at most.

Later there was the mother with the haunted eyes. They called her in to identify the body, and she stood in the white-tiled room at Bellevue, silently looking down at her son, shaking her head. While Johnny Lloyd stood nearby, remembering the panic that had driven him to kill. Instinctive fear had reacted; not a sensible cop trying to do a good job.

It was cold when Johnny went home later that night. He was dressed warmly and the apartment was heated and Mickey had

prepared him a hot supper. But still he was cold. The chill came from deep inside him, and there was nothing he could do to warm it. Mickey knew something was wrong. She tried to cheer him.

"You're tired. I'll be glad when your night duty is over and you'll be back working days."

"It'll be good," he said.

She came close to him, and her body was very warm. "Whatever it is, Johnny, don't let it trouble you. It'll seem better in the morning."

"Sure, sure," he said. He could feel her hands encircling him, caressing his neck, touching his face. And he wanted to be gentle to her.

"We've got each other, and our life together is the most important thing, isn't it?" she was saying.

He wanted to tell her about what had happened, but he couldn't find words.

"I love you, Johnny," she said.

He couldn't make love to her. Not now. Of all times not now. He groped for words to make her understand his feelings. "I know you love me," he said to her impatiently.

And still he could feel her close to him, trying to calm him, talking to him about their life together.

He couldn't stand it. The tension of the night welled up in him.

"Leave me alone," he burst out. "For God's sake, can't you see when a man wants to be left in peace?"

It had hurt her. He could tell by her expression that it had hurt her a lot.

Johnny heard Dunnegan's voice breaking into his thoughts. He had almost forgotten that the older policeman was there.

"The captain's coming," Dunnegan said. "Now you can stop worrying. I told you he'd be asking for volunteers."

The captain and two sergeants were climbing toward them.

"Well, kid, how about it? Have you still got cold feet?"

"Don't worry about me," Johnny said.

"Three times a hero. Here's your chance for a nice, juicy promotion," Dunnegan taunted in a whisper.

The captain reached their landing. He was out of breath and wiped his perspiring forehead with a handkerchief.

"They're barricaded in a front room," he said. "I want to draw their fire as little as possible. This whole district is overcrowded with women and children. We can't get tear gas through the win-

dows because they have them shuttered up. We'll have to crash it."

Dunnegan stepped forward. He glanced at Johnny out of the corner of his eye. "I'd like to try my hand at it, captain."

The captain looked him over. "Married? Kids?"

"Yes, sir. Two kids."

The captain shook his head. "No men with children." He looked at Johnny.

"I'll try it, sir," Johnny said almost without having heard his own words.

"No children, sir."

"Your name?" the captain asked.

"John Lloyd. Emergency duty attached to the 23rd Precinct."

"The Dillard brothers, sir," Dunnegan said to the captain.

The captain stared at Johnny for a few seconds. "Lloyd . . . Lloyd," he said to himself, trying to remember. "Oh, yes. The Dillard brothers on the Lower East Side, two years ago. They killed one of our men before you went in after them."

Dunnegan was grinning. He looked at Johnny and nodded his head.

The captain took Johnny's hand and shook it. "You sure volunteer for the tough ones, son," he said. "Okay, we'll give you all the covering fire we can. Wait until you hear it. Stick to the wall as close as possible and make your way through the front door. Get in close and then fire the tear gas in through the transom. That's the whole job. Don't try any fancy work. Good luck."

He patted him on the back and Johnny smiled, one quick darting smile before he started down the hall.

"Cover him," the captain ordered Dunnegan. "That boy's all right."

With one last look at Johnny's retreating figure, the captain walked hurriedly downstairs to assume command.

There was another cop on duty near the apartment door. Johnny walked toward him. He thought he heard Dunnegan call something, but he didn't pay any attention. The minutes he'd spent with Dunnegan were behind him, futile. He'd learned nothing from Dunnegan, gained nothing. He'd still have to solve his problems in his own way.

And the problem right now was the narrow, paint-chipped tenement door. Through the gaping hole that had been ripped in it he could see the dingy anteroom.

"The trouble is, you can't see the room they're hiding in," the cop said. "If you could make it through the door to the end of the corridor, you'd be all set. It's about twenty feet, though. You'd better be careful."

Twenty feet; Johnny thought. About three times the length of his own bed at home, and the cop made it sound like a thousand miles.

He chanced another look through the battered door. The apartment anteroom was illuminated by a dim light coming from around the corner. The room was very narrow and long, and an oversized table left only a foot to get by. Long sheets of wallpaper hung loose from the wall, showing the plaster beneath.

"Looks lousy, eh?" the cop said.

"Lousy," Johnny agreed.

"There's a bright side, though. There should be a glass transom over the door of the room they're in. At least, the apartments on the floor below this have transoms."

"Let's hope they don't have this one all boarded up."

Johnny weighed his chances. From their hiding place they could fill the anteroom with a hail of ricocheting fire. From where he was he could not even see their door. He'd have to make it down the narrow hall, squeeze past the table, and expose himself to direct fire. Only then would he be able to aim the tear gas gun at the transom.

Suddenly he heard the decoy shots from the street. That would draw their attention to the windows. There was no time to think further now. He must go right ahead.

He stepped squarely in front of the apartment door, reached in through the splintered hole, pulled the latch and swung it open.

Four running steps brought him past the table to the end of the anteroom. He saw the door behind which the men were trapped.

Above the old wood door was the transom, glass shattered and dirty. And even as he saw this he fired through the opening. He reloaded and fired again—and a third time, then, crouched low, dodging back to the hall outside.

A wild fusillade of bullets followed him back, whining as they ricocheted. He dropped to the floor outside, panting heavily from the short sprint that he had just made.

"You okay?"

"Okay."

"Whew!"



"You said it."

And now they waited tensely for the fugitives to appear. The strangled coughs and gasps of tear-gassed men were already coming from the apartment, and slender wisps of the gas began to flow out, filling the battered looking hall with strong acrid fumes.

The firing ceased.

It wasn't likely that they'd try anything, Johnny thought. Tear gas usually took the fight out of even the toughest. And yet . . .

He felt the cop beside him prod his shoulder. "Watch it, watch it. We can't be sure yet."

It was difficult to see into the fumes. The coughing came closer, accompanied by shuffling, stumbling feet. A man gasped and cursed.

For a moment the door was obscured by a cloud of gas. Johnny knew there was someone hiding there, and he knew that this time there'd be no mistake. Sure, no matter what he did he'd be in line for a medal and a promotion. Whether he captured them dead or alive, the words of praise would be the same: courage, valor, character. But the words would not sound the same to him. He waited silently.

And suddenly he knew that there was a great difference in the waiting. He was tense and excited, but the fear was where it belonged, not threatening to swerve him out of control.

The men stepped into the open.

One was short and stocky, with bushy black hair. The other was tall, gangling, with a long narrow face. They were rubbing their eyes like sleepy children, coughing and gasping for air.

"Look at the dangerous characters," the cop beside Johnny said. "Some sight, all right."

Now that it was over, Johnny felt good. It was better than the exhausted, empty feeling of danger having passed. It was a sudden strong feeling, the knowledge that there was something worthwhile waiting in the future. He didn't try to think about it. Instead, as they led their prisoners downstairs, he thought about Mickey.

He could clearly remember the many places they had seen together, the good things they had enjoyed, days of planning for the future and nights in each other's arms. And now, suddenly, he knew that it was all only the beginning—but a wonderful, beginning.

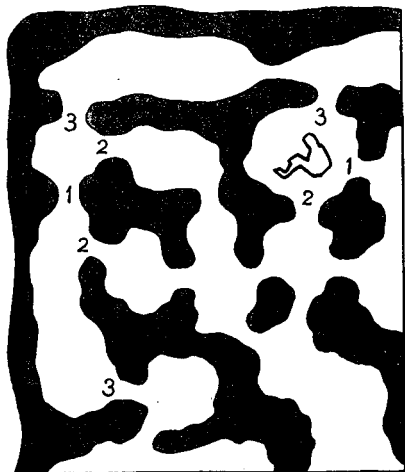
The captain and Dunnegan were waiting downstairs with the other men. The captain gave a few orders and the men got into

their cars, Dunnegan into his prowler car and Johnny into the emergency truck with the prisoners. A siren growled to clear the way, and one by one the police cars drove off.

The people came out of their houses—the dirty children, the women in ill-fitting cotton dresses, the old men. For a while they discussed the incident, and soon it was lost in the small talk of everyday life. Ninety-eighth Street was quiet once again.

### **SOLUTION TO THE NOVEMBER “UNSOLVED”:**

In this type of puzzle, each cave or cell can be entered *and* left again only if it has an even number of doors. If it has an odd number of doors, like the one Bad Karl starts from, it can either be permanently vacated or must finally be permanently occupied (supposing that all the doors have to be used). The diagram shows the only caves with an odd number of doors, but the two on the left may be treated as having only two doors each if the one connecting them is ignored. Thus, Karl need leave only this one door unused, passing through all the other thirty-seven in any of several possible orders, without crossing his own path.



# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Carol Harper



**E**leanor Taylor Bland has written a first novel that deals with murder, schizophrenia, and runaway children. **Marti MacAlister** is a black female cop, widowed and raising two children in Lincoln Prairie, Illinois. She is convinced that the runaway children know something about who killed eccentric old Lauretta Dorsey at the Cramer Hotel. A second murder puts Marti on the spot, having to solve the crime before the killer strikes again. **Dead Time** (St. Martin's, \$17.95, 211 pp) is an auspicious beginning for Ms. Bland.

Harry Kemelman brings back Rabbi David Small in **The Day the Rabbi Resigned** (Fawcett, [no price given] 215 pp). Rabbi Small has finally had it with his Barnard's Crossing congregation. He wants to teach and get away from the political squabbles, the clerical duties, the demands his congregation puts on him. Unfortunately, as he is contemplating a letter of resignation, Chief Lani-gan puts him to work on a drunk driving accident that looks like murder. Will the rabbi solve the crime? Of course. Will the rabbi leave Barnard's Crossing? You'll have to read the book to find out.

**City of God** by Michael Jahn (St. Martin's, \$21.95, 280 pp) places Detective Bill Donovan of NYPD in the middle of an investigation of murder at St. John the Divine. A serial killer seems to be haunting the chapels and corridors of the great unfinished cathedral, murdering all those who appear to "defile" the House of God. Meanwhile, Donovan's girl Marcie has lost a friend to murder during the running of the New York City marathon. Donovan is not on the case, but Marcie blames their relationship for this killing. When the two murder cases become linked, Donovan must not only

solve the case before the killer strikes again, he must repair his relationship with Marcie.

**A Stained White Radiance** (Hyperion, \$19.95, 305 pp) by James Lee Burke is the fifth in his Dave Robicheaux series. In this installment, Dave is worried about his lovely wife Bootsie, who does not seem to be responding well to medical treatments for her lupus. And Alafair's pet raccoon has really strained relations with Batist in the fish camp—the raccoon breaks into the food supply and messes up the store, much to Batist's disgust and Alafair's confusion. Meanwhile, the Sonniers, old school acquaintances of Dave's, have asked him for help—bullets have been fired at the eldest son, and it appears the loan sharks from New Orleans are after him. The rest of the family includes a televangelist brother, a racist politician brother, and Dave's schooldays girlfriend. The Cajun feel of rural Louisiana, coupled with hints of current events and scandals in religion and politics, spices up Burke's engaging mystery.

**Party Till You Die** by David Charnee (St. Martin's, \$17.95, 232 pp) is a first novel featuring D. L. Blacker, an attorney who sidelines as a clown, and his associate Pat Arnold, juggler, street artist, and actor, who narrates. Charnee himself is an attorney and clown, and so this somewhat incongruous combination seems quite realistic. Both Blacker and Arnold are called upon to entertain at a corporate party arranged by Pat's "agent." When the agent is killed during the party, the entertainers are among the suspects. Blacker and Arnold set out to prove the police wrong and find the real murderer.

**Death by the Light of the Moon** by Joan Hess (St. Martin's, \$18.95, 227 pp) is the seventh in a series featuring Claire Malloy, bookstore owner, widow, and mother of a teenaged girl. In this mystery, Claire takes her daughter Caron kicking and screaming to a reunion of her dead husband's family. Not that there is any love lost between Claire and the family, but it would seem that all the relatives have been called back to the ancestral manor in Louisiana to guarantee their place in Miss Justicia Malloy's will. Claire feels that Caron should get at least that much from her father's family, but she doesn't count on the premature death of Miss Justicia and a classic country house murder mystery.

**Murder on the Chesapeake** by David Osborn (Simon & Schuster, \$19.00, 205 pp) features Margaret Barlow as a photojournalist, rather well known in her field, who has a granddaughter in residence at Brides Hall, a private girl's academy and Margaret's alma

mater. Margaret is called in to investigate the accidental hanging of a young and unpopular scholarship student (or is it a suicide as the students suspect, or even murder as Margaret begins to suspect?). This is Margaret's second venture into investigation, detective-style.

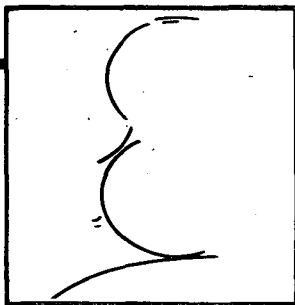
**Judgment of Death** by Bob Biderman (Walker, \$19.95, 224 pp) is also the second in a series. Biderman, an American expatriate living in France, features Joseph Radkin, an investigative journalist, in this fledgling series. Radkin is sent to London to complete an assignment left unfinished by another reporter, who was killed in a hit-and-run. Or was he? The story is two-part: a Victorian murder case in which an American woman was convicted of poisoning her abusive husband with strychnine, and a similar modern case in which another woman, this time British, is in jail for poisoning her abusive husband. When it begins to appear that the original reporter was also poisoned, prior to being hit by that mysterious truck, that witnesses are fast disappearing, and that local reporters and police are trying to direct his investigation, Joseph begins to suspect that there is more than history and possible miscarriages of justice at stake here.

William L. DeAndrea has resurrected Niccolo Benedetti after thirteen years to star in **The Werewolf Murders** (Doubleday Perfect Crime, \$16.50, 234 pp). Benedetti and his team of assistants, Ron and Janet, are called to the Mont-St. Denis resort in France to investigate some bizarre murders that have taken place at an international scientific convocation. Rumor is now rampant: a werewolf is the culprit, and he has even struck at the police, murdering a member of the Sûreté in the office of the local police chief. Benedetti uses Ron and Janet as his investigative team, but it is his abstract painting exercises that eventually reveal the murderer.

**Dancing with the Dead** by John Lutz (St. Martin's, \$18.95, 208 pp) introduces the reader to the world of competitive ballroom dancing. There is a serial killer loose, and this killer is doing in dancers who, in many ways, resemble Mary Arlington in appearance. Mary is also a competitive dancer, and to her, it is obvious that dance is the connecting link, even though the police are skeptical. She contacts the husband of the latest victim and collaborates with him, long-distance, in their own private investigation. All of this is set against a background of abusive relationships and dance studio escapism.

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



**I**n **A Stranger Among Us**, the latest effort from director Sidney Lumet, Melanie Griffith stars as a cynical, hardboiled New York City cop. Known on the force as a "cow-boy" who courts danger, Griffith's Emily Eden (good name) seems to take too many chances in her professional life to make up for a lack of nerve in her personal life.

Griffith as a tough, street-wise cop is a bit of a stretch, especially when she belts out lines like "You wouldn't believe the things I've seen" in that baby-doll voice. But when she goes undercover into Brooklyn's close-knit Hasidic Jewish community, as one of them, she's stretched almost to the breaking point.

While her hospitalized patrol partner (and off-duty lust interest) recovers from a knife wound inflicted during a mid-town arrest, Detective Eden is

assigned to investigate the disappearance of a young Hasidic jeweler about to be married.

She reluctantly takes the case, telling her commanding officer, "A guy disappears on his family—what are you kidding me?" And off she goes to question the Hasids, inappropriately attired in a tight-fitting skirt, shapely white blouse, and spike heels.

Eden's initial encounters with the head rabbi and other important religious types are played out comically. When she crosses her legs, they are quickly covered by a Hasidic woman standing by with a shawl. Also, her language is perhaps a bit more salty than the rabbi is used to hearing.

On her next visit, Detective Eden shows she can learn. She's dressed more modestly, in jeans, a blue workshirt, and a sport jacket.

After her initial investiga-

tion, a corpse is found and we have a murder case on our hands. Since Eden is convinced the killer is someone known to the victim, she decides to go undercover.

She dons a mousy brown wig and even more modest clothing and moves in with the rabbi and his two adopted children. Leah, played sweet and shy yet inquisitive by Mia Sara, becomes Eden's friend. Ariel (Eric Thal), the rabbi's handsome heir apparent who was the murder victim's best friend, becomes her friend and then some. The rabbi and his family, along with the murdered man's grieving fiancée (Tracy Pollan), are the only ones aware of Eden's true identity.

A troubling aspect of this film as a murder mystery is the lack of suspects, not to mention the lack of suspense. The victim's fellow Hasids are all sweet, pious, and family oriented.

The religious and social life of the Hasidic community is painted lovingly by a talented crew. While praying, singing, laughing, or eating, the Hasids are bathed in a soft yellow light that succeeds in giving them an otherworldly character.

Finally the real New York intrudes in the form of a pair of boorish goons looking for protection money at a diamond

district showroom. It's not their first visit, and their words and actions make them shine as prime suspects.

Okay, but where are the red herrings, where are the twists and turns in the plot? Even as a straight police procedural, there's just not enough excitement here. (There *is* a wild, out-of-control chase scene in the diamond district.)

The focal point of *A Stranger Among Us* is Detective Eden's tentative relationship with the rabbi's scholarly son Ariel. Sure, he's goodlooking—Don Johnson watch out. Sure, he's brilliant. But a shiksa New York cop and a respected Hasidic scholar? As they say in *Wayne's World*, "not."

Their relationship, however unbelievable, is not without its humor. Newcomer Eric Thal, whose bright eyes stand out from his bearded face, shows embarrassment well. And he's embarrassed aplenty by the very secular and sexy Emily Eden, for not only is she undercover, she wants him under the covers as well.

For Lumet, whose last cop film, *Q & A*, was a pulse-pounding, urban explosion, this tale is quite tame and won't be on the list of his hard-hitting films like *Twelve Angry Men*, *Serpico*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, or *Prince of the City*.



# THE STORY THAT WON

The July Mysterious Photo-William F. Smith of Garden mentions go to A. C. Stone of Robert V. Kesling of Ann nien of Brooklyn, New York; Tennessee; Betsy Fisher of Timothy Miller of Terre Haute, Indiana; Greg Matejek of Belle Mead, New Jersey; John L. Reilly of Clearwater, Florida; Robert Grotz of Palos Verdes Estates, California; and Nancy D. Whitney of Valrico, Florida.



graph contest was won by Grove, California. Honorable Windsor, Ontario, Canada; Arbor, Michigan; Stuart Bry-Richard Tanner of Kingsport, Delmar, Maryland; John

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## OFF THE WALL by William F. Smith

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Inspector Pierre LaRoche was tired but jubilant as he trudged up the steps leading to the top of the old castle's parapet. For years he had been hoping to arrest the notorious jewel thief Jules Bijoux, and now the moment of triumph was imminent.

After Bijoux stole gems from several celebrities at the Cannes International Film Festival, LaRoche pursued the miscreant to this remote ruin near Vence. The inspector was confident Bijoux was carrying the jewels, so now the rascal was trapped. But why had Bijoux run to the top of this tower when the old worn staircase was the only way up or down? LaRoche shook his head and slid his revolver from his holster as he took the final three steps up into the sunlight. His squinting blue eyes surveyed the area. There was no conceivable hiding place, and there was also no Jules Bijoux.

"*Sacrebleu!*" LaRoche muttered. "*C'est impossible!* I myself saw the rogue go up the stairs just moments before I mounted them. Yet he is not here."

The inspector raised his eyes as he heard the voice from above. "*Au revoir, Rocky, mon vieux.*" LaRoche saw Bijoux smile and wave as he peered down from the basket suspended from the hot air balloon that was drifting rapidly toward the Italian border.

"*Oh, merde alors!*" LaRoche cursed. "Once more he flies the coup!"

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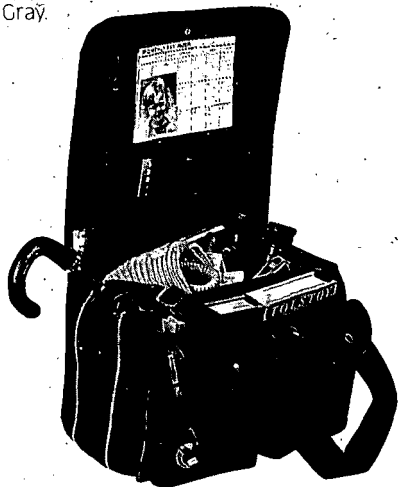
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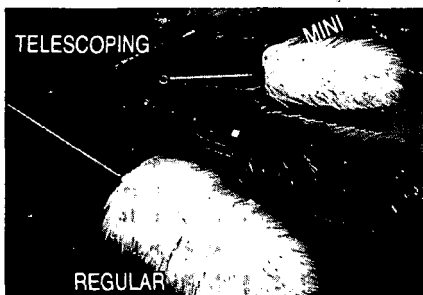
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